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AS PARKS AND RECREATION'S LAST SEASON BEGINS, METRO LOOKS BACK AT ALL THE THINGS WE LOVE ABOUT PAWNEE PAGE 20

Diploma drama

Students in some Alberta classrooms attempting to write their high-stakes Grade 12 English diploma exams online faced repeated delays PAGE 3

Suncor slashing 1,000 jobs

The Calgary-based oilsands giant says the job cuts will mainly affect contractors PAGE 16

GREEN LINE GOES HERE?

A CTrain running over top of Calgary's Centre Street Bridge is the first of four ambitious — some might even say crazy — options for the proposed north-central portion of the eventual Green Line of the LRT. The others you'll have to hear to believe. Check out page 6 to find out why Mayor Naheed Nenshi is anticipating "the most interesting committee meeting we've ever had" when the plans come before councillors in more detail next month. ROBSON FLETCHER/METRO

Premier softens on sales tax

Budget crisis. Prentice says public servants' wages too high

RYAN TUMILTY
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Premier Jim Prentice's hard-line stance against a provincial sales tax softened Tuesday, and high public sector wages were targeted as his government grapples with a looming budget crisis.

Speaking to the Edmonton Economic Development Impact lunch, Prentice said he still personally opposes the sales tax, but wants to hear from Albertans.

"I don't think Albertans generally advocate a sales tax, but I'm prepared to be educated and to hear from people," he said. "It's time for people to speak up about this."

Even if oil prices rise to $62 a barrel next year, Prentice said the province would have a $6 billion hole in the budget.

"This is the most significant public financial circumstance that we have seen in a generation," he said.

He said the province would be pushing real restraint on public spending and would contemplate a deficit, but taxes also had to be on the table to keep the province on the right fiscal footing.

Prentice also said public sector wages would be examined in Alberta.

"In every level of public employment we have, we're paying vastly more than anyone else in the country and it's not sustainable," he said.

Using education as an example, Prentice said 77 per cent of that ministry's budget is wages and they will have to be examined as Alberta deals with the reality of low oil prices.

Mark Ramsankar, president of the Alberta Teacher's Association, said teachers have already helped Alberta's finances and he's disappointed Prentice is making them a scapegoat.

"Teachers have done their part. We've had three years of wage freezes," he said. "This isn't new management. This is standard fare."

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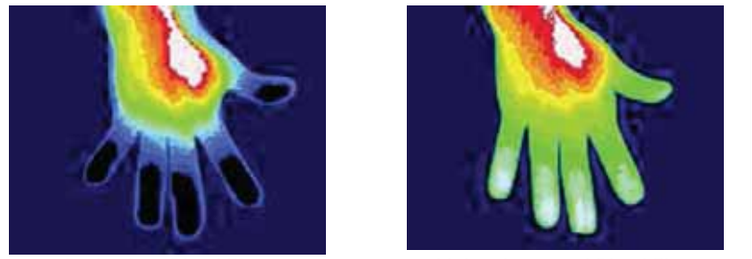

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Computer glitches mar Grade 12 diploma testing

Testing turmoil. Pens replaced PCs as some students spent up to six hours attempting to complete heavily weighted exam

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The pen proved mightier than the keyboard in some Alberta classrooms Tuesday as thousand of students attempting to write their high-stakes Grade 12 English diploma exams online faced repeated delays.

The technical glitches were so severe that at least one school board is requesting the option to toss the marks altogether. Typically, the diploma makes up 50 per cent of a senior student's grade.

Tuesday's exams were to be written online using a program called Quest A+, but Calgary teachers speaking to Metro on condition of anonymity said whole classes couldn't access the program and some that could were unable to properly enter their confirmation code.

At one school, a teacher said instructors gave up and resorted to more traditional methods.

"They're writing with pencils and on paper ... (like) the old days," he said.

A second round of diplomas for social studies was planned for Wednesday, but it wasn't clear whether the program would be working for all students by then.

In some Alberta classrooms on Tuesday, computer tests weren't all they're cracked up to be. Technical glitches led to hours-long delays. JAE C. HONG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

In Edmonton, Catholic district spokeswoman Lori Nagy said her organization asked that the marks be tossed if a student's in-class grade was higher. She said more than 260 students were affected by the technical difficulties.

"This was a difficult morning and very frustrating for students because, as you can imagine, they're already a bit anxious going in to write their diploma exam," Nagy said, noting some students spent up to six hours attempting to complete the exams.

Calgary Catholic School District spokeswoman Tania Younker said her organization had yet to make a similar request but was in close talks with Alberta Education about the impact to its kids.

"Certainly, there's concern that it was hard for students to adapt that quickly.... Some got onto Quest and completed the exam, some didn't," Younker said. "There were different formats."

The Calgary Board of Education said in an email it had not made a similar request. Metro inquiries for comment were directed to a letter from superintendent of learning innovation Cathy Faber, in which she stated, "Further conversation is required to clarify the impact on students."

"Please be assured that both the Calgary Board of Education and Alberta Education are doing, and will do, everything possible to support students and schools," Faber wrote to parents. "We will advise you as more information becomes available."

Alberta Education spokeswoman Tamara Magnan blamed the server crash on a system overload. Approximately one-third of students writing Tuesday's exam were using the program — a 15 per cent increase from last year — which caused the server to crash.

Alberta Teachers' Association president Mark Ramsankar called the server crash frustrating and questioned how the government planned to handle student marks.

"To me, that seriously brings into question the validity of the exam results themselves," he said.

WITH FILES FROM LEAH HOLOIDAY/METRO IN EDMONTON

Drunk-driving deaths 'remarkably low' in 2014

Figures from the Calgary Police Service show the number of impaired-driving fatalities in 2014 dropped by roughly 61 per cent when compared to the previous year. METRO FILE

Calgary residents may be sobering up to the dangers of impaired driving.

The number of people killed in collisions in which alcohol was involved has dropped significantly in 2014, according to recent figures from the Calgary Police Service.

In 2013, there were 18 people killed in collisions in which alcohol was involved. Last year that number dropped to seven, a decrease of 61 per cent.

"In comparison, they're remarkably low," said Staff Sgt. Paul Stacey with the CPS traffic section.

Stacey said a number of factors have contributed to the drop.

"We've really been driving home the message about impaired driving," he said. "We always have but we've been out there with our check stops every week throughout the year."

Stacey noted tougher impaired-driving legislation from 2012 has also helped.

"The measures that are being taken now are much stricter, and we are pulling a lot of vehicles off the road for people that are borderline impaired.

"It's better than no deterrent at all, so we're hoping something like that is top-of-mind."

Denise Dubyk of MADD Calgary said she feels the decrease could be a sign the public is taking its message to heart.

"That's what we work toward and that's what the police work toward," she said. "Zero fatalities is our goal, so when we see a decrease, it's definitely a positive."

Dubyk warns, however, that this shouldn't lull Calgarians into a false sense of security.

"We need to continue collectively working together as we do now and step it up even more," she said.

Overall, the number of fatal collisions in Calgary dropped by 30 per cent from 2013 to 2014.

MORGAN MODJESKI/METRO

MLA scolds housing company as constituent faces ouster

CHC. Affordable housing group says dispute officer agreed it has cause to kick client out

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Frank Anderson and Calgary-Currie MLA Christine Cusanelli look over documents concerning his arrangement with the Calgary Housing Company, which is due to expire at the end of the month. Cusanelli is drawing into question the efforts made by the affordable housing group to assist clients like Anderson, who recently separated from his wife and once battled an addiction to drugs. JENNIFER FRIESEN/FOR METRO

Shelter life looms for a Calgary father of three young children — and his representing MLA is pointing the finger squarely at the city's affordable housing company, which she alleges has done nothing to help him get back on his feet.

Frank Anderson, 55, has been living in a southwest townhouse owned by the Calgary Housing Company for four years. He admits that a portion of his rent, paid out in monthly $490 instalments, wasn't paid last year during a period that saw him separate from his wife and lose his roofing company.

But Anderson contends he's working to pull things together — he's attempting to enrol in school to boost his computer literacy skills — and he has only recently been granted visits with his three boys, all under the age of five.

In February, his custody arrangement will evolve to allow overnight stays, but now he fears he won't have a home to provide for them as CHC has said he's to pack his bags and be out by January's end.

"I've been told to check with the shelters to see if they have a space for me," Anderson said. "How am I suppose to visit with my children when I'm sleeping on a mat?"

Anderson's story has stirred Calgary-Currie MLA Christine Cusanelli and her staff into action. They've been in talks with CHC and the elected member told Metro she still has no clear idea as to why Anderson is being forced out.

"At the end of the day, this is about children — should they go see their father in a shelter? I'm thinking not," she said.

Cusanelli questioned what supports CHC has in place for its 10,000 residents, many of whom deal with issues related to financial stability, mental health and drug addiction.

But CHC general manager Geoff Kneller said Tuesday that while his organization had to respect the privacy of its client, it took the matter in question to the impartial Residential Tenancy Dispute Resolution Service (RTDRS) and an officer ruled in their favour. The service allows tenants and landlords to bypass the courts for housing disputes on claims up to $50,000.

Kneller said the tenant was given two months to find alternative housing and ordered to pay outstanding rent owed up to Jan. 31.

"We go through a very long process with our clients before we ever involve the RTDRS, it's always the last step that we would take," he said.

Kneller said he found Cusanelli's comments concerning, especially given that the dispute service is run by the province.

Salaries

City council gets 3.8% pay raise

After denying themselves a raise last year, city council received an automatic 3.8 per cent pay bump in 2015, and Mayor Naheed Nenshi is now the most highly compensated municipal leader in the country.

Nenshi will earn $216,402 this year, while councillors will earn $115,298 each after the pay raise, which is tied to the increase or decrease in average weekly earnings of Albertans, as reported by Statistics Canada.

Council had voted during 2013 budget deliberations to freeze their salaries for 2014, ahead of contract negotiations with unionized city employees.

No such move was made during last November's budget deliberations for 2015 and beyond.

Nenshi now has the highest salary of any mayor in Canada, but it's not because of the 2015 pay raise.

Rather, it's because of Brampton, Ont., Mayor Linda Jeffrey's fulfilment in December of an election promise she made to cut her own salary to $165,850.

Her predecessor, Susan Fennell, was defeated in last October's municipal election. Had she won, she would have made roughly $232,000 in 2014.

A spokesman for the mayor said Nenshi intends to continue donating 10 per cent of his salary to charity, as he has done in past years.

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Price tag now $6.7M

Calgary Cycle Track Network approved with $395K cut from Stephen Avenue portion

Calgary city council gave the final go-ahead to the Centre City Cycle Track Network Tuesday, minus $395,000 for the portion along Stephen Avenue.

The pilot project, set to open to cyclists in July, will see physically separated bike lanes built on numerous downtown roadways.

Coun. Druh Farrell proposed an amendment Tuesday to reduce spending for "shared space construction" of the portion of the network along Stephen Avenue — a route currently restricted to pedestrian traffic only from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. — to $200,000, down from the previous budget of $595,000.

Mayor Naheed Nenshi said the lower amount would be "more than adequate" to pay for entry gates at intersections (estimated at $138,000) and pavement markings (another $62,000) on Stephen Avenue.

"I am confident we can make that work," transportation general manager Mac Logan said of the reduced budget.

Coun. Sean Chu, who had indicated he wanted to remove funding for the Stephen Avenue portion altogether, reluctantly supported Farrell's plan.

"It pains to me say, but I'll probably vote yes to this $200,000," he said before the final vote.

The total price tag for the project is now $6.7 million, down from $7.1 million.

The cycle-track network is to be evaluated for a period of just over a year before council will decide whether to make it permanent, alter it, or remove it.

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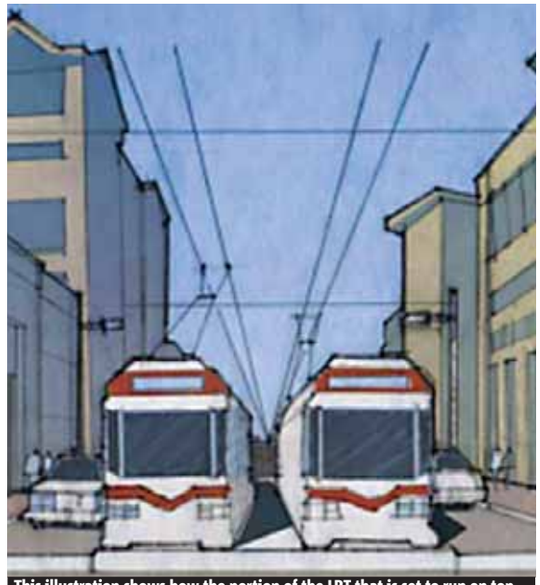

This illustration shows how the portion of the LRT that is set to run on top of Centre Street North might look. COURTESY CITY OF CALGARY

Options for LRT route ambitious

Green Line. Council hears four ambitious options for CTrain route

ROBSON FLETCHER
robson.fletcher@metronews.ca

A train on the Centre Street bridge. A tunnel under the Bow River. A bridge over Prince's Island Park. A 15-metre elevated track that runs above downtown +15 skywalks.

These ideas may sound ambitious — crazy, even — but at least one of them will be seriously undertaken, no matter which of four options Calgary city council approves for the eventual north-central line of the LRT.

"This is exciting," Mayor Naheed Nenshi said Tuesday as senior transit planner Jonathan Lea explained the four possible options, all of which involve a CTrain along Centre Street North. The question is how far to run that track on top of Centre Street versus below it, and then how to cross the Bow River and get through downtown heading to 10 Avenue South.

Option one would see light-rail tracks replace at least one traffic lane on the existing Centre Street bridge, then make a "very sharp turn" at 3 Avenue and continue south through downtown, mostly at-grade but tunneling beneath the existing 7 Avenue LRT and CPR tracks.

Option two would see a long and deep tunnel run all the way from 24 Avenue North, under the Bow River, under downtown, and emerge at 10 Avenue South. Lea said this option would mean the station at 9 Avenue North would have to be built 45 metres under ground.

"It can be done but there are impacts — cost and operating impacts," he said of such a "very deep" station.

Option three would involve a "shallower tunnel" starting at about 20 Avenue South and then emerging to cross the Bow River over a "zero emissions" bridge — open to just CTrains, cyclists and pedestrians — that would continue over top of Prince's Island Park and touch down in Eau Claire, then tunnel beneath the 7 Avenue LRT and CPR tracks.

"So that's one of the big impacts of this one — you'd have a new concrete structure over one of our beloved parks," Lea said.

Option four would be similar, but would see the bridge continue all the way through downtown and over the tracks to 10 Avenue South, including running above +15 walkways along 2nd Street.

"We'd have to be 15 metres in air to clear these, so that's about the same scale as Sunalta Station," Lea said.

Council's transportation and transit committee will discuss the options on Feb. 18.

Quoted

"There's a lot of trade-offs that have to be made."

Mayor Naheed Nenshi, on choosing one option over the others.

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Comic Expo

Comic book legend returning to Calgary

The comic book godfather is coming back to Calgary.

Stan Lee, who co-created heroes like Spider-Man and Iron Man, will be in town for the Calgary Comic and Entertainment Expo, running April 16 to 19 at Stampede Park. Lee also attended last year's event.

Stan Lee
GETTY IMAGES

"Stan is a giant in the comic book industry and one of our most requested guests," said Emily Expo, Calgary Expo host in a release. "It felt right to bring him back for our 10th anniversary."

Tickets for the event are on sale now. METRO

Six-figure earners

Wildrose alleges health-care salaries surging

Alberta's opposition Wildrose Party is calling on the province to publish the salaries of health-care workers earning over $100,000 as it says newly obtained documents indicate a major increase in staff falling into the lucrative category.

The province has said recently that Alberta Health Services workers would be among those exempt from having their salaries disclosed in a sunshine list detailing salaries in excess of $100,000.

But the Wildrose says documents indicated the number of employees earning six figures has jumped to almost 9,800, up from 4,688 in 2009.

But Robert Armstrong, the health body's acting vice-president of human resources, said Tuesday the figures were misleading and the result of "more complete" reporting of earnings, not a mass influx of raises.

AHS said data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information indicates it's tied for the lowest health-care administrative expenses in Canada alongside B.C. JEREMY NOLAIS/METRO

2013 flood

Thousands of disaster recovery claims remain open

Thousands of Disaster Recovery Program claims related to the 2013 flood remained unresolved at the end of 2014 and more than 100 appeals remained open, according to provincial government documents published Tuesday by the Alberta Party.

Party leader Greg Clark said the still unresolved claims — which represent about 20 per cent of the 10,594 applications filed in the wake of the southern Alberta floods — represent a broken promise by Premier Jim Prentice.

"The expectation was set in the political level that they're going to 'deal with DRP' by the end of the year," Clark said.

In a Sept. 26 press release, the provincial government said: "To speed response to outstanding flood relief applications, the Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) appeals staff will be tripled with the goal of clearing outstanding appeals by December 2014."

At the time, there were 677 open appeals.

Clark said it's unclear whether the appeals open at the end of December were new or outstanding, as applicants "can't appeal until their file is closed."

Prentice said Tuesday the province has "made a lot of progress" since tripling claim-processing staff from six to 18 employees.

"Since we did that we cleared 80 per cent of the appeals," the premier said.

More than 8,000 of roughly 10,600 claims had been processed in September, according to the province.

ROBSON FLETCHER/METRO, WITH FILES FROM RYAN TUMILTY

U of C prof delves into world of Archie comics

Betty or Veronica?

Professor takes new views on iconic characters in his latest book

HELEN PIKE
helen.pike@metronews.ca

Don't trust Betty — at least that's one of the tidbits a University of Calgary professor found in his studies of a childhood classic. Archie and his pals have stepped into the academic pages of Bart Beaty's latest creation: 12 Cent Archie.

"Betty has everybody fooled," said Beaty. "Betty is really actually kind of a bit of a crazy person, who is trying to break up her best friend's relationship ... we should maybe cast a skeptical eye on the way that Betty behaves a lot of the time."

The chronicles of Archi, a loveable all-American teen redhead, were closely scrutinized by Beaty, who spent a good two years working through about 900 comics from the 1960s to create his 100-chapter book.

For the most part, Beaty said, stories in the simplistic comics are identical, but it is in the standout frames where interesting themes emerge.

"I argue that Archie might secretly be in love with Midge even more than with Veronica," said Beaty. "But he's afraid of Moose and never really acts on it."

One chapter in the book even mathematically proves Archie and Veronica are best suited for marriage. It was written by Robert Oxoby, an economics professor who crafted the equation in 2012 to prove his Betty-loving friends wrong when Archie ultimately chose Veronica.

"It's super-costly to divorce Betty because she's the all-American girl," said Oxoby. "You'd do better to marry Veronica, because nobody's going to be pissed if you divorce Veronica."

His humorous equation uses three main assumptions and looks at Archie's overall happiness. It concludes that because Veronica is wealthy, and not well-liked she is the better choice — unless of course Cherry Blossom was in the running.

University of Calgary professor said he now knows way too much about Archie comics, but what he learned from his research of over 900 comics may surprise you. HELEN PIKE/ METRO

Beaty isn't sure about applying math to the age-old question: Betty, or Veronica.

"I think it's kind of a funny chapter," he said. "Just the idea you would apply math to this topic rather than obviously listening to your heart."

Calgary artists feel loss of Edmonton theatre landmark

Edmonton firefighters fought an early morning blaze Tuesday at the Roxy Theatre. RYAN TUMILTY/METRO

A fire at a longtime Edmonton theatre made waves in the Calgary arts community, as local folks came to terms with the abrupt loss of a building that housed countless performances for years.

The Roxy Theatre, a historic venue and home of Theatre Network, burned to the ground early Tuesday morning leaving the city's arts community devastated and scrambling to find a new venue mid-season.

Nextfest, an 11-day summer event drawing in over 600 artists was one of the theatre's events that highlighted some of the scene's up-and-comers, including Kevin Jesuíno.

"Theatre Network and the Roxy were sort of an incubating ground for me and a bunch of other artists," Jesuíno said.

He works in Calgary now as a community arts facilitator at Antyx Arts, but got a start at the Roxy years ago after a few years abroad. They gave him a job — something that's rare in Alberta's pool of paying jobs for artists.

Quoted

"It's expected that the theatre community and the arts community in all of Alberta will come together to support them." Kevin Jesuíno

"It's expected that the theatre community and the arts community in all of Alberta will come together to support them and get them through this hard time," Jesuíno said. "Art teaches us resilience and it teaches us how to be creative in the moment."

HELEN PIKE/METRO, WITH FILES FROM LEAH HOLOIDAY AND LUCY HAINES

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Urban planning

City bringing back the Baconfest

Calgarians interested in urban living can learn more about the subject at the city's Baconfest 2, which starts Wednesday.

According to the City of Calgary's website, the event hopes to provide residents with "engaging dialogue about urban planning" and features several documentaries on the subject.

The event starts with a screening of Gary Huswit's Urbanized, which examines how cities are designed, on Wednesday night, and The Human Scale, by Andreas Dalsgaard, screens on Jan. 21.

Movies will also be screened on Jan. 28 and Feb. 11, with all showings taking place at the Calgary Central Library's Dutton Theatre. METRO

Flood recovery

High River getting back on its feet with community help

A community devastated by flooding in southern Alberta 18 months ago is getting back on its feet with the help of community donations.

An update on High River's disaster-relief fund indicates more than $820,000 has been issued amongst the community south of Calgary.

Distributed in the form of community grants for flood renewal and recovery projects, a total of 45 groups have gotten assistance.

However, some businesses are still waiting for funding or for repairs.

More than $327,000 remains in the fund, and the town continues to look for donations. METRO

Shaila Khan with her 14-year-old daughter Maarya, one of 75 kids who attended Christine Meikle School last year. METRO FILE

Verdict renews hope for special needs school

Similar cases.
Scenic Acres residents have no plans to appeal judge's ruling on francophone school

Parents of special-needs students say a judge's ruling this week has given them new hope that a long-awaited replacement school will go ahead as planned.

On Monday, Hon. Justice D.B. Nixon shot down a push by residents in Scenic Acres to block a francophone school in their neighbourhood on the basis that the transfer of land for the site violated the Municipal Government Act (MGA). Nixon found the residents lacked the requirements to even bring the claim against the school.

The matter is similar, although not identical, to a push by residents in nearby Varsity to block a replacement Christine Meikle School for special-needs kids. The Varsity residents also claim the MGA was violated and say the school could create traffic jams and diminish property values.

But Shaila Khan, whose daughter attends the current, deteriorating Meikle site, said she is overjoyed to learn of the Scenic Acres ruling and looked forward to learning the fate of her family's school.

"I don't see any harm with the school being in there — from what I see, it's all beneficial for the community, actually," she said.

Lawyer Christopher Davis, representing the frustrated residents in both Scenic Acres and Varsity, said that the Meikle ruling was not a foregone conclusion.

Nixon's oral judgement Monday indicated that even if he did rule in favour of the Scenic Acres residents, he could only turn the land back to the City of Calgary, and elected councillors would then determine its fate.

Davis noted, "Fundamentally, the judge made this out to be a case of discretion.... He seemed to ignore the fact that the city council might make a different decision."

JEREMY NOLAIS/METRO

Choosing the program that's right for you is a big decision. That's why SAIT Polytechnic offers information sessions – your golden opportunity to discover your program options, ask questions and sometimes, tour our campus.

Our sessions are free and range in topic and timing. Details on all our sessions can be found on the events calendar at sait.ca.
Here are just a few we're offering this month:

ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOUNDATIONS

SAIT offers English language upgrading to help ESL learners live, work or pursue education in Canada. Discover the English Language Foundations full- and part-time course collection, admission requirements, your funding options and what we can do to support your goals.

Join us Wednesday, January 14 from 6:00 – 8:00 pm in Room N108, Chinook Lodge Aboriginal Resource Centre in the Senator Burns Building. For more information or to confirm your attendance, please call 403.210.4045 or email elf.infosession@sait.ca.

BROADCAST SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY

Looking for a unique career that combines your resourcefulness with your technical expertise? The Broadcast Systems Technology program at SAIT Polytechnic is the perfect answer as it focuses on the technical aspects of the broadcast industry, and qualifies graduates for well-paying jobs that are in high-demand. Get trained on emerging digital systems so you can start a career you will love in the exciting world of audio and video technologies!

Join us on Wednesday, January 14 at 7:00 pm in Room E114 in the John Ware Building.
Call 403.284.8081 or Email bxst.info@sait.ca to confirm your attendance or for more information.

GEOSCIENCE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

(PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS EXPLORATION INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY)

Are you interested in an oil and gas career that combines geology and geophysics and computer science? If so, then SAIT's two year, Geoscience Information Technology diploma program is for you.

Join us on Wednesday, January 14 at 7:00 pm in Room MD217 in the Stan Grad Centre.
Call 403.210.5753 or Email gsit.info@sait.ca to confirm your attendance or for more information.

JOURNALISM AND PHOTOJOURNALISM

Interested in a career that combines your creativity with your resourcefulness? The Journalism and photojournalism programs at SAIT are the perfect solution as they focus on communications, News writing, and photojournalism. Get trained at SAIT, and start a career that you will love.

Join us on Wednesday, January 14 at 7:00 pm in Room H101 in the Senator Burns Building.
Call 403.284.8849 or Email ja.info@sait.ca to confirm your attendance or for more information.

LIBRARY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Interested in a career that combines your high-level organization skills with technology? The Library Information Technology program at SAIT is the perfect solution as it focuses on database searching, how to access information and helping people find information. Get trained at SAIT, and start a career that you will love.

Join us on Wednesday, January 14 at 7:00 pm in Room H105 in the Senator Burns Building.
Call 403.284.8849 or Email lit.info@sait.ca to confirm your attendance or for more information.

SAIT POLYTECHNIC

Notice of Hearing For
Permanent Guardianship Order To
Samantha Illisa Smith

Take notice that on the **28th of January 2015 at 9:30 a.m., at Calgary Family Court, Courtroom #1205, 601 – 5th Street SW, Calgary, Alberta,** a hearing will take place.

A Director, under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act will make an application for: **Permanent Guardianship Order** of your child born on **February 19, 2014**. If you wish to speak to this matter in court, you MUST appear in court on this date. You do have the right to be represented by a lawyer. If you do not attend in person or by a lawyer, an Order may be made in your absence and the Judge may make a different Order than the one being applied for by the Director. You will be bound by any Order the Judge makes.

You do have the right to appeal the Order within 30 days from the date the Order is made.

Contact: Diane Charlebois; Jackie Ellice; Daniella Eggink
Calgary and Area Child and Family Services
Phone: (403) 297-2978

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Major security changes for Hill were rejected: Sources

Shelved over a year ago. Proposals included having a unified security force on Parliament Hill

At least two separate proposals urging major changes to Parliament Hill security were prepared and shelved more than a year before the Oct. 22 attack on Parliament Hill, Torstar News Service has learned.

At the request of former public-safety minister Vic Toews, the RCMP worked on a proposal for a single security force.

The idea of a single force is akin to the U.S. Capitol Police, a federal law-enforcement agency that protects the American Congress. Some advocates believe such a force would offer both cost savings and tighter security. There does not, however, appear to be any appetite internally or externally for that force to be the Mounties.

But for reasons that are not clear, according to multiple sources who spoke to Torstar on condition they not be named, the proposal did not advance and was rejected in 2013 after Toews was replaced by Steven Blaney.

An advisory group of senior Commons and Senate members that was struck after the Oct. 22 attack is working to come up with recommendations for overhauling security on the Hill — with one eye on exactly that: A single force that could look more like the one that patrols Capitol Hill.

The group has already adopted new measures towards unifying the security services. There is a single point of command; up to last week that was Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin Vickers, and on an interim basis it is Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms Pat McDonnell.

Sources say that a group of senators drafted a response to the federal auditor general's report of June 2012, which agreed with the audit and urged the two parliamentary services be unified. However, it appears the suggestion foundered long ago over disputes about whether the Commons and Senate authorities would have equal say in its management.

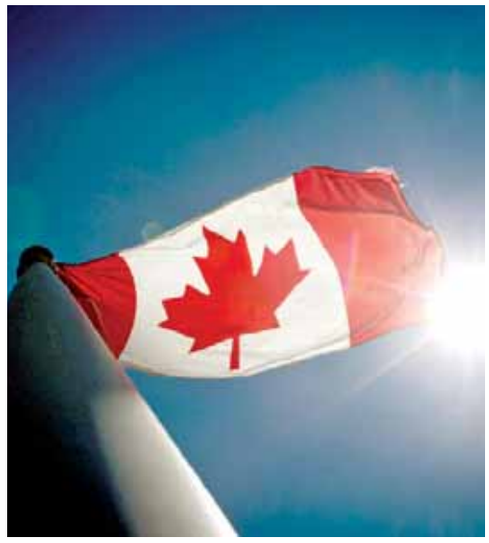
Two sources also said the Conservative government was considering a dramatic suggestion to turn Wellington Street in front of the Parliament Buildings into a pedestrian mall and re-route traffic, as was done in 1995 with Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Advisory group

Torstar has learned that other recommendations of the security advisory group include:

- Pushing the physical screening of public visitors onto the exterior of the parliamentary lawn and away from Centre Block.
- The closure of two public points of access onto the Hill leaving just three main entrances where gate checks could be conducted.
- Mandatory firearms training for all guards.



Day of the flag draws near

With Feb. 15, the 50th birthday of Canada's beloved Maple Leaf flag, approaching, some are wondering why there has been so little fanfare from the federal government. The party planning appears to pale in comparison to a multimillion-dollar effort to mark Canada's 150th birthday in 2017 and the $5.2 million that was spent to mark the bicentennial of the War of 1812. The founder of the Canada Flag Holiday Campaign wrote to Prime Minister Stephen Harper this week to express his disappointment in the government's lack of plans to celebrate the flag, the brainchild of former Liberal prime minister Lester B. Pearson that was adopted in 1965. DARRYL DYCK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Ottawa

U of O and its president face suit

The University of Ottawa and its president, Allan Rock, face a class-action lawsuit over the suspension of the men's hockey team in connection with a sexual-assault probe. The lawsuit was launched Tuesday in Ontario's Superior Court of Justice. Two students on the team were charged last summer with sexual assault. The two are not part of the lawsuit. THE CANADIAN PRESS

National security

Terror suspects were on watch list

The three suspects arrested in a five-day terrorism sweep were among roughly 90 names on the RCMP's national-security watch list, Torstar News Service has confirmed. Law enforcement sources expect more terrorism-related arrests, as the world's attention remains focused on last week's attacks in Paris.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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Chimp gets frozen treats

A chimpanzee named Paulinho holds two popsicles at the city zoo, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Tuesday. Zoo animals were given frozen snacks made from tropical fruits, chunks of meat and frozen yogurt to help ease the intense summer heat. SILVIA IZQUIERDO/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Free-climbers near summit of El Capitan

Yosemite National Park. The granite facing of El Capitan's Dawn Wall inside the park is considered the world's most difficult rock climb

Two climbers are almost to the top, in their bid to become the first in the world to use only their hands and feet to scale a sheer granite face in California's Yosemite National Park.

A spokeswoman said Tuesday that 30-year-old Kevin Jorgeson and 36-year-old Tommy Caldwell will likely finish the climb up El Capitan's Dawn Wall on Wednesday evening.

For 17 days, the two have been attempting what many thought impossible. The men are "free-climbing" to the 914-metre summit. This means they don't use climbing aids, other than ropes to prevent deadly falls.

Each trained for more than five years, and they have battled bloodied fingers and unseasonably warm weather.

Jorgeson fell 11 times over seven days trying to get past one tough section. He took to Facebook on Sunday to publicly celebrate his victory.

"It took everything in my power to stay positive and resolved that I would succeed," he wrote of his continued attempts to get past the gruelling section.

The climb began on Dec. 27 and was expected to take two weeks. If the men finish Wednesday, they will have been on the wall closer to three weeks. El Capitan, the largest granite monolith in the world, has about 100 routes to the top. The first climber reached the summit in 1958.

In 1970, Warren Harding and Dean Caldwell — no relation to Tommy Caldwell — climbed Dawn Wall using ropes and countless rivets over 27 days. The duo turned down a rescue attempt by park rangers in a storm.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

India

Bad batch of liquor kills at least 28

A bad batch of bootleg liquor killed at least 28 people and sent 160 others to hospitals in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, officials said Tuesday.

Many of the victims had gathered to watch a cricket match Sunday evening in a village about 30 kilometres southwest of the state capital, Lucknow, government official Anil Garg said. By midday Tuesday, 28 people had died, including 11 in a nearby village, police officer Mukul Goel said.

Police arrested the shop owner who sold the pouches of homemade alcohol for about 30 cents each. A raid of the shop uncovered large containers of chemicals, which were sent to a laboratory for testing, district official R.K. Pandey said.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mozambique

Contaminated beer claims three more lives

Three more people have died from drinking contaminated beer, bringing the number of fatalities to 72, as the number hospitalized fell by more than 150, health authorities in Mozambique said Tuesday.

About 35 victims are now hospitalized.

Dozens of people fell ill in Chitima and in the neighbouring Songo district after drinking traditional beer, known as Pombe, at a funeral over the weekend. The beer, brewed from millet or corn flour, is believed to have been poisoned with crocodile bile, according to district health officials. Police investigating the incident said the barrel in which the beer was originally brewed has since disappeared.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Muhammad weeps on Charlie Hebdo's cover

Defiant front. Shows prophet holding a sign with words 'All is forgiven' above him

Patrick Pellous, Charlie Hebdo journalist and president of Liberation, holds the new issue of Charlie Hebdo at a press conference at the Liberation offices in Paris on Tuesday. AURELIEN MEUNIER/GETTY IMAGES

Charlie Hebdo released a new version of its irreverent and often offensive newspaper Tuesday, defiantly putting a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad on the cover that drew immediate criticism and threats of more violence.

The newspaper also skewered other religions, and ran a double-page spread illustrating Sunday's march in Paris that drew more than a million people to condemn terrorism, claiming that the turnout was larger "than for Mass."

"For the past week, Charlie, an atheist newspaper, has achieved more miracles than all the saints and prophets combined," it said in the lead editorial. "The one we are most proud of is that you have in your hands the newspaper that we always made."

Charlie Hebdo planned an unprecedented print run of three million copies Wednesday — one week to the day after the assault by two masked gunmen that killed 12 people, including much of its editorial staff and two police officers. It was the beginning of three days of terror that saw 17 people killed before the three Islamic extremist attackers were gunned down by security forces.

Surviving staff members are now using the offices of the Liberation newspaper, which has lent out space.

The latest cover shows a weeping Muhammad, holding a sign reading "I am Charlie" with the words "All is forgiven" above him. Renald Luzier, the cartoonist who drew the cover image under the pen name "Luz" said it represents "just a little guy who's crying."

Then he added, unapologetically: "Yes, it is Muhammad."

Speaking at a news conference in Paris on Tuesday at which he repeatedly broke down crying, Luzier described weeping after he drew the picture. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Anti-terrorism

PM asks for tougher measures

France's prime minister demanded tougher anti-terrorism measures Tuesday after deadly attacks that some call the French Sept. 11 — and that may already be leading to a crackdown on liberties in exchange for greater security. Police told The Associated Press that the weapons used came from abroad, as authorities in several countries searched for possible accomplices and the sources of financing for last week's attacks.

Germany. Leaders push for tolerance

German political and religious leaders appealed for tolerance Tuesday in the wake of the Paris terror attacks, a message meant to counter both religious extremists and growing anti-Islam protests in Germany.

Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Joachim Gauck were among those who took part in the rally organized by Muslim groups near Berlin's iconic Brandenburg Gate and the French embassy, where wreaths were laid for the 17 people killed by Islamic extremists in Paris last week.

A group calling itself Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West, or PEGIDA, has been staging anti-Islam protests in the eastern city of Dresden for the last three months. Its latest protest Monday drew a record 25,000 supporters, with speakers citing the Paris attacks as proof of the danger posed by Islam. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Baga, Nigeria. Conflict with Islamic militants grinds on

Nigeria's president was among the leaders who condemned last week's attack by Islamic extremists on the French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo, yet his response to the slaughter of civilians by militants in his own country has been muted.

Some commentators criticized President Goodluck Jonathan's reticence about the violence in Nigeria's Baga town and the lack of a broader international outcry on par with the reaction to the attacks in France. The slogan "I am Baga" — a play on "I am Charlie," the expression of solidarity with the targeted French weekly — is now circulating on social media.

The global sympathy and the defiant rally in Paris that drew foreign leaders after the assaults that killed 17 people overshadowed the killing of hundreds and perhaps as many as 2,000 people in Baga, a northeastern town near Chad.

Jonathan, who has been touting his domestic record ahead of a re-election bid next month, was quick to express solidarity with France.

It did not release a similarly forceful statement about Baga. The attack there started on Jan. 3 and was another bloody marker in a murky, grinding conflict in which information is often scarce, the insurgency is seen by many as a local problem and violence is routine. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Children stand near the scene of an explosion in a mobile-phone market in Potiskum, Nigeria, on Monday. Two female suicide bombers targeted the busy marketplace on Sunday. ADAMU ADAMU/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Will he walk free?

Egypt overturns last conviction of Mubarak

An appeals court on Tuesday overturned the last remaining conviction against Egypt's deposed leader Hosni Mubarak and ordered his retrial on corruption charges, opening the door for his possible release.

The ruling, just days before the fourth anniversary of the start of the 2011 anti-Mubarak uprising, pointed to how far Egypt has moved away from its revolutionary fervour to "bring down the regime." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Hague

Ugandan rebel leader on trial

Uganda's military said Tuesday the Lord's Resistance Army rebel commander who surrendered to American troops last week will be taken to The Hague for trial. Dominic Ongwen is now in U.S. custody in eastern Central African Republic, the country where he surrendered on Jan. 6, Uganda army spokesman Lt. Col. Paddy Ankunda said. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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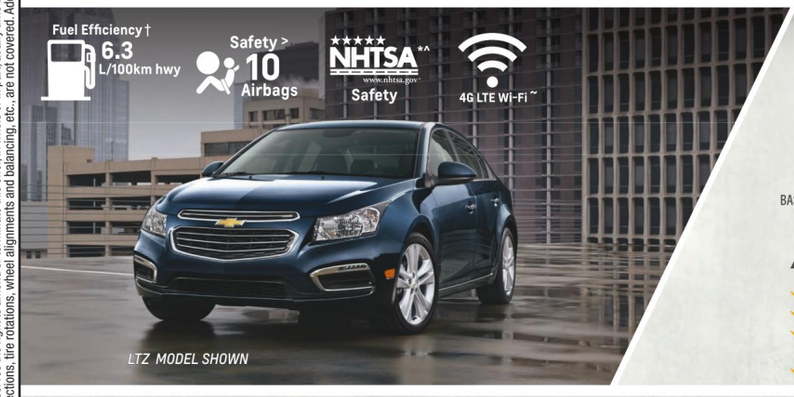

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Missing children

Facebook to show Amber Alerts on mobile devices

Facebook Inc. is working with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in the U.S. to send Amber Alerts to Facebook users' mobile phones if they are in a search area where a child has been abducted.

Facebook says several children have been reunited with their families as a result of information shared on its site.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Market Minute

DOLLAR 83.65¢ (+0.09¢)

TSX 14,187.16 (- 77.85)

OIL $45.89 US (- 18¢)

GOLD $1,234.40 US (+ $1.60)

Natural gas: $2.943 (+14.8¢)
Dow Jones: 17,613.68 (- 27.16)

Alleged Silk Road boss goes on trial

Supporters of Ross Ulbricht, the alleged creator and operator of the Silk Road underground market, stand in front of a courthouse in New York City on Tuesday, the first day of jury selection for his trial. The San Francisco man is charged with running an online black market where drugs were sold as easily as books and electronics. Prosecutors have been allowed to introduce evidence about six alleged murder plots. The government maintains that Ulbricht attempted to protect his operation by asking others to kill those who posed a threat to his business.

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Suncor cutting 1,000 jobs as oil plummets

Reducing spending.
Oilsands giant says it is taking $1 billion out of its 2015 budget

Suncor Energy Inc., a huge presence in Alberta's oilsands, is reducing its workforce by 1,000 and cutting $1 billion from its capital budget as the company grapples with plummeting crude prices.

Calgary-based Suncor says the job cuts will mainly affect contractors but include some employee positions as well. In its annual report, Suncor said it had 13,946 employees.

In November, Suncor predicted capital spending for 2015 would range between $7.2 billion and $7.8 billion. At the time, crude was around $75 US a barrel. U.S. crude settled at $45.89 US a barrel on Tuesday, less than half of what it was six months ago.

"Cost management has been an ongoing focus, with successful efforts to reduce both capital and operating costs well underway before the decline in oil prices. However, in today's low crude-price environment, it's essential we accelerate this work," Suncor CEO Steve Williams said in a release.

Projects that haven't yet been given a final go-ahead by Suncor's board are being deferred, such as expansions to the MacKay River steam-driven oilsands project in northeastern Alberta and the White Rose development off the east coast. But major projects under construction, such as the $13.5-billion Fort Hills mine north of Fort McMurray and the Hebron field in offshore Newfoundland, are moving ahead as planned.

Quoted

"Today's spending reductions are consistent with our commitment to spend within our means and maintain a strong balance sheet."

Suncor CEO Steve Williams in a release

Suncor expects the closely watched U.S. benchmark crude, West Texas Intermediate, to average $59 US a barrel in 2015. Western Canadian Select, the measure of Canadian heavy crude, is expected to be $42 US a barrel. And Brent is predicted to average $65 US a barrel.

On Monday, Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. announced it would slash its 2015 budget by 28 per cent. One of its oilsands projects called Kirby North is being deferred, and drilling activity in Western Canada is going to be slowed substantially.

Canadian Natural said it does not foresee layoffs but has frozen hiring.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

VOICES

FALL IN LOVE RIGHT NOW

Try a little social experiment. Turn to the person sitting beside you on the train or bus and go through the 36-point exercise printed below. It could make you fall in love.

It apparently worked for Mandy Len Catron, a University of British Columbia writing teacher, who fell in love with a man after going through this very exercise and staring into his eyes for exactly four minutes.

The experiment was created more than 20 years ago by psychologist Arthur Aron, who says he successfully got strangers to fall in love by having them ask and answer a series of questions that gradually become more and more intimate. Len Catron recently wrote about her experience in the New York Times, detailing how she and an acquaintance recreated the experiment at a bar one night — and two hours later were in love. Skeptical? Give these a try!

Grab a random stranger and start asking questions — it just might lead to love. ISTOCK

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?

2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?

3. Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?

4. What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?

5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?

6. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?

7. Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?

8. Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.

9. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?

10. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?

11. Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.

12. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

13. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future or anything else, what would you want to know?

14. Is there something that you've dreamt of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?

15. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?

16. What do you value most in a friendship?

17. What is your most treasured memory?

18. What is your most terrible memory?

19. If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?

20. What does friendship mean to you?

21. What roles do love and affection play in your life?

22. Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.

23. How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people's?

24. How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?

25. Make three true "we" statements each. For instance, "We are both in this room feeling ..."

26. Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share ..."

27. If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know.

28. Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.

29. Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.

30. When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?

31. Tell your partner something that you like about them already.

32. What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?

33. If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?

34. Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?

35. Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?

36. Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

****Don't forget to stare at each other for four minutes after****

Et voilà! You should be deciding on the names of your children right about now. METRO

SO ... DID IT WORK?
Let us know at readers@metronews.ca

I broke my back sledding a decade ago, and I'm still suffering

DYLAN REARDON
readers@metronews.ca

I've watched the debate about whether cities should ban tobogganing with some interest. Sledding can be dangerous, and I think municipalities should have some control over where it happens. I should know: I broke my back a decade ago while sledding at Confederation Park in Calgary, and my life has been altered by that event.

On Boxing Day of 2003, my brother and I decided to go sledding. I hadn't been tobogganing in a decade, and the weather was fantastic: sunny, blue skies, mild temperature. There may have been a chinook that day.

Upon arriving at the hill, there were ominous signs that amused me at the time: a broken GT Snow Racer ski, pieces of shattered crazy carpets, lost gloves, helmets, etc. Years later and after the fact, I like to refer to the scene as a toboggan graveyard. My brother went down the hill first on a large plastic disk. The snow was compact, presumably from thrill seekers leading up to that day, and because the weather was quite warm, the snow had melted and re-frozen a few times. As a result, he went like a bat out of hell as I watched anxiously.

It was my turn. I didn't even have a chance to put my legs back onto the toboggan before I was completely out of control. My journey down the hill seemed like minutes, and the whole time I was using my legs as breaks to try and slow my speed. And then: BAM! It was a feeling I have trouble describing. A feeling I cannot forget. My entire body felt like it was broken in half. All I felt was pain. It was fierce and relentless, and I've never felt anything like it since.

When I arrived at the hospital, they tied me down to a table for two weeks before placing me in a body cast for six months. I had suffered a burst-compression fracture of my L1 vertebra.

While in hospital, I was told that tobogganing accidents are incredibly common, and one of the reasons for this is that the human derriere isn't built to absorb the extreme forces that come from tobogganing. Unlike, say, the knees when you're skiing.

Since the accident I've suffered from chronic pain and an inability to sit down or sleep for any length of time. I can walk but in a very limited sense: typically no more than a few hundred metres before the back pain gets too intense. When this happens, my legs also become weak.

The medications to deal with this are brutal in that they make me incredibly tired and zombie-like. Since the break, I've been losing more and more feeling in my legs. About 40 per cent total loss right now. The reason is that over-compensation has led to increased degeneration of my spine directly above where I broke my back.

Like every sport or activity, tobogganing carries risks and dangers. Mine was a freak accident. I could have broken my neck on the boards playing hockey. I could have been hit in the head with a golf ball while on the back nine.

I do not agree with an outright ban, and limiting times and conditions seems like ridiculous government overreach. However, designating safe places to toboggan seems like a prudent course of action. There are inherent risks in any activity, but we can try to minimize those risks.

Dylan Reardon is a Calgary-based student and writer. He runs the satirical news website Urban Anomie.

metro

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Gossip

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METRO'S TAKE ON THE WORLD OF CELEBRITIES

Leonardo DiCaprio GETTY IMAGES

Leo and RiRi play the flirting game

Rihanna GETTY IMAGES

Leonardo DiCaprio and Rihanna were spotted living it up together at a recent Playboy Mansion party, which admittedly sounds like a game of Hollywood gossip Mad-libs. But when it comes to how intimate they were getting, we're left with a different game all together: duelling anonymous sources.

One such source claims that DiCaprio and Rihanna were being incredibly flirty, going so far as locking lips at the soiree.

But another? "No one was making out. They are just friends. That's it," the second source tells E! News. "There was a big group dancing. Tom Hardy, Naomi Campbell and a bunch of other people. Everyone was having a good time together. Maybe a little bit of friendly flirting, but no scandal here."

Oh, you're no fun.

And baby makes twee... Zooey expecting first child

Zooey Deschanel GETTY IMAGES

The nice thing about all these celebrities having lifestyle websites is that they can handle all their big life announcements themselves.

Much like Blake Lively did last October on Preserve, New Girl star Zooey Deschanel has used Hello Giggles to reveal that she is pregnant. Deschanel and boyfriend Jacob Pechenik are expecting their first child together this summer.

"Jacob and I are over the moon. We are so excited to meet our little one," Deschanel says in a statement.

As of press time, there was no word on how chunky the baby's bangs would eventually be.

Well, that's creepy! Jen on Billy Bob's to-do list

Everyone has goals, dreams, items on their bucket list, things they really want to do. For a newly minted Golden Globe winner, that includes Jennifer Aniston. Billy Bob Thornton did a bit of an overshare backstage at the Globes when Access Hollywood challenged him to a game of Would You Rather, pitting celebrities against each other to vie for the Fargo star's amorous attention. Asked to choose between Reese Witherspoon and Aniston, Thornton quickly replied, "Jennifer Aniston, lifelong goal. That's all I'm saying." A simple yes or no would have sufficed.

He even doubled down when presented with a choice between Aniston and Keira Knightley, saying, "Jennifer Aniston. How many times does it take you to get this through your head?"

The creepiness of his fixation aside, he at least gets high comedy marks for his response to the options of Bill Murray and Christoph Waltz: "I don't even know what the second one is, so Bill Murray." The second one, Mr. Thornton, is someone who has more Oscars than you. Just so you know.

Billy Bob Thornton, Jennifer Aniston GETTY IMAGES

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We'll miss you, good people of Pawnee: Bidding farewell to Parks and Recreation

Final season. Can we really live in a world with no more quotes from Ron Swanson? We'll just have to try

LISA WEIDENFELD
Metro in New York City

The sad day is finally upon us: We must now begin saying goodbye to Leslie Knope and the parks department on Parks and Recreation. The show started its final season last night, and while it has come close to being cancelled nearly every season it's been on, that doesn't make the prospect of saying farewell any easier.

Parks and Recreation found a devoted audience who loved its optimistic humour and careful creation of a fictional but delightful town. Here are the five things we'll miss most about the show.

Co-workers who actually like each other

- The cubicle drones of The Office often seemed to be living in a state of barely concealed distaste for each other, but Parks and Recreation has generally gone in the opposite direction, with the exception of poor Jerry. Or Gary. Or possibly Barry, by this point.
- As different as the various Parks department employees are, they've always been supportive of each other's endeavours, from Donna investing in the Snakehole Lounge with Tom to the way everyone pulled together for Leslie's ill-fated city councilwoman campaign.

The town of Pawnee, Ind.
We may not have known much about humble Pawnee at the beginning, but we've all grown to love the residents of the town (which we all know is First in Friendship, Fourth in Obesity).

And who hasn't enjoyed learning about the colourful Pawnee city mottos? There was the time they got taken over by the cult of Zorp, or the time they claimed to be the birthplace of Julia Roberts, then got sued for it. Mostly, we'll miss the town's historical murals, each of which is more offensive than the last.

Leslie Knope herself
At its best, the show found great ways to translate Amy Poehler's high-energy screen presence into a character who was both hugely dorky and inspirational.

Sure, she loved organizing everything in binders, and went overboard in every facet of her life, but Leslie was that rare comedic creation whose arc combined personal and professional achievements in a way that made everyone root for her.

The couples
Remember the episode when April and Andy got married on a whim, only a few episodes after starting to date? It's unlikely anyone would have guessed those two would be the most stable relationship on the show, but the writers always found cute, funny ways to make them work as a couple, despite Andy's cluelessness and April's hatred of, well, everything.

And while we're happy Ron found love with Lucy Lawless' Diane, we're sad we won't get to see any new adventures between Ron and Tammy, because Nick Offerman and Megan Mullally brought just the right degree of crazy every time they were onscreen together.

It always warmed your heart
Parks has gotten a lot of credit over the years for the warmth of its humour. The show makes you laugh at the antics of its characters, but never sneers at them or asks viewers to mock them. Sure, we knew most of Tom's business schemes were doomed to failure, but he's now started a few successful ones, and no one on the show treated him like he was a fool for dreaming of a life beyond Pawnee. And as outlandish as Leslie's behaviour got, the people around her always loved her for it.

Amy Poehler as Leslie Knope on Parks and Recreation. CONTRIBUTED

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$27,988 | 73,642 KM | $199/BW | LEATHER • NAV • SUNROOF

2011 LINCOLN MKX AWD
E-1927A

$26,988 | 120,000 KM | $218/BW | NAV • LEATHER

2013 FORD EXPLORER SPORT
27224

$39,995 | 51,000 KM | $269/BW | ECOBOOST • NAV • DVD

2008 LINCOLN MKZ AWD
13928

$9,977 | 85,068 KM | $117/BW | NAV • LEATHER

2010 VW CITY GOLF
EK-223A

$11,995 | 52,891 KM | $103/BW | M/T • AIR CONDITIONING

2011 FORD FIESTA SE
F-695A

$9,998 | 50,226 KM | $81/BW | AUTO • A/C

2011 F150 LARIAT 4X4
E-2558A

$26,977 | 124,000 KM | $217/BW | LEATHER • SYNC

2012 HONDA CIVIC EX-L
F-355A

$14,977 | 83,450 KM | $119/BW | LEATHER • NAV

2010 VW PASSAT CC HIGHLINE
E-2667A

$23,130 | 31,073 KM | $187/BW | AWD • SUNROOF

2014 FORD FUSION AWD
14010

$25,988 | 15,000 KM | $389/BW | ECOBOOST • NAV

2012 RAM 1500 SPORT 4X4
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WOOD AUTOMOTIVE GROUP

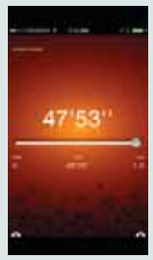
How-to

Save money at the airport

1. Rather than shelling out a taxi fare at the airport's front door, persuade a friend or relative to drive you.
2. Take a bus, train or the local transit to and from the airport, even if it means leaving home earlier — and packing lighter.
3. Take an empty water bottle through security, then fill it up on the other side. You don't need to pay $5 for a bottle of water.
4. Coffee up at home.
5. Bring foods that are easy to pack — sushi, sandwiches — and skip departure lounge food.
6. Avoid the shops! Bring books, magazines and sundries like batteries with you. DOUG WALLACE/METRO

Tool

Sunscreen app



Heading south? Load this free app onto your phone to keep sunburns to a minimum. You enter your location, skin type and the SPF of your lotion. The app then detects the UV Index rating of your sunny spot and sets a timer to alert you when it's time to apply more sunscreen. It also comes with info on health precautions to help you avoid the dreaded lobster look and other more serious problems. Free for Android and iOS.
DOUG WALLACE/METRO

Deals

Cuba for less

Cuba has always been the cheap and cheerful route for a week at the beach. Sunwing is making it even more attractive with deals on a few all-inclusive Cuban resorts they've recently started to work with, including up to 45 per cent off the new, 530-room Memories Holguin Beach Resort in Holguin. Get up to 20 per cent off at the new five-star Royalton Hicacos Resort & Spa in Varadero and up to 25 per cent off at the new Starfish Cayo Santa Maria, which is gigantic at 1,300+ rooms. Visit Sunwing.ca.
DOUG WALLACE/METRO

National Geographic explores the tourism business

Thatched bungalows in the rainforest of Costa Rica and luxurious tents in the Australian Outback are among some of the properties chosen to form National Geographic's new collection of boutique hotels and lodges. Launched as the National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World, properties chosen were judged on factors such as design and character, guest experience and quality of service, and sustainability practices. The initial collection includes 24 lodges that span the world, from Australia to Canada, and includes Newfoundland's Fogo Island Inn (pictured above). Special NatGeo packages are also being launched within the group that offer add-ons such as a private sunset wildlife cruise at the Nimmo Bay Wilderness Lodge in B.C., or a private tour and outing with an on-site scientist at The Brando in French Polynesia. TEXT AND PHOTO: AFP

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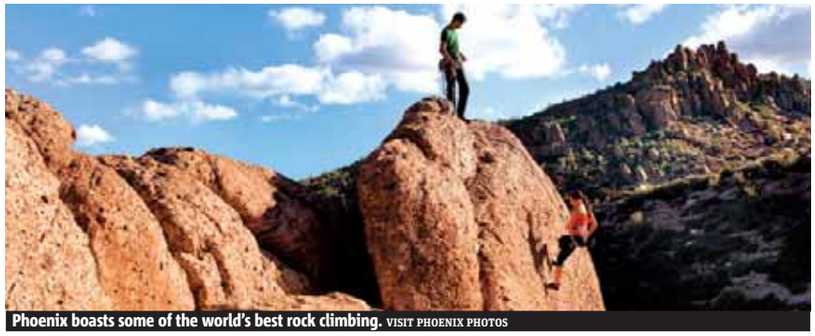
The Desert Botanical Garden has the largest collection of cacti in North America.


Phoenix boasts some of the world's best rock climbing. VISIT PHOENIX PHOTOS

Gateway to the great outdoors

Phoenix. Urban sophistication meets thrilling adventure

VAWN HIMMELSBACH
For Metro

Phoenix is one of the sunniest cities in the U.S. — but it's not just for snowbirds looking to escape the harsh Canadian winter.

As the gateway to the Grand Canyon, Phoenix is set against a backdrop of rugged mountains in one of the lushest deserts in the world. But it also has a sophisticated urban scene, with boutique hotels and luxury spas, plenty of nightlife, and some of the best southwestern food around.

"It's a wonderful place for our northern friends to thaw out and leave their parkas behind," said Douglas MacKenzie, media relations director with Visit Phoenix.

The city's dependable sunshine makes outdoor activities a way of life — whether rappelling into a wet canyon or enjoying a craft cocktail on a poolside patio.

In the fall and winter, the climate is ideal for hiking and biking (in the spring, blooming wildflowers carpet the desert).

Hike the Cholla Trail on Camelback Mountain or the numerous trails in the Phoenix Mountain Preserve. Or check out the views from a hot air balloon, on a Jeep tour or while riding a horse.

While there are plenty of culinary options, Phoenix is known for its authentic southwestern and Mexican fare. Kai is the only Five Diamond Native American restaurant in the world, while the locals head to Los Dos Molinos for no-fuss traditional Mexican.

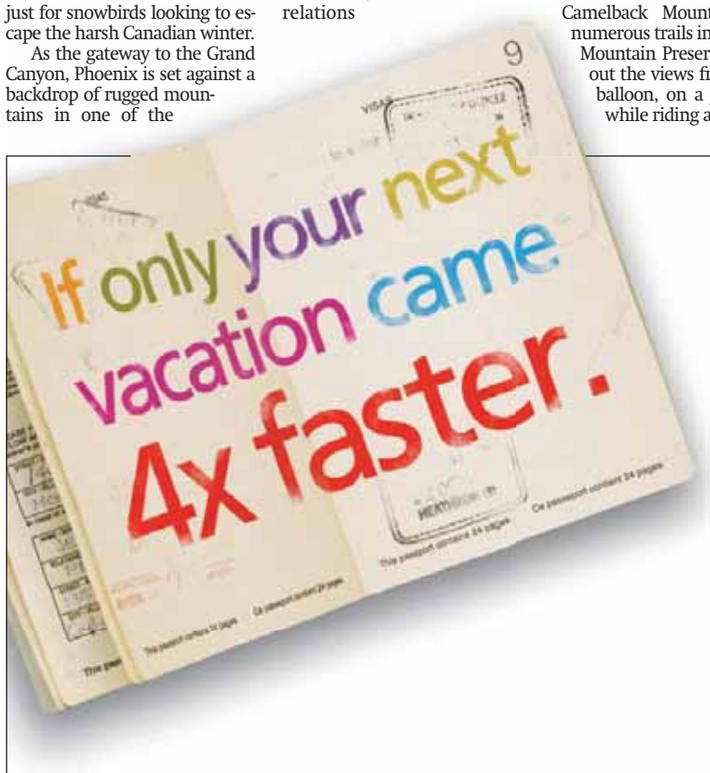
Phoenix offers a range of hip boutique hotels and luxury resorts with spas and golf courses, but there's also the unique option of staying at a dude ranch for a true cowboy experience. Or step into luxury at the Arizona Biltmore (Frank Lloyd Wright served as consulting architect).

"We have 62,000 hotel rooms in the Greater Phoenix Area and one to fit everyone's budget from economical to five-star luxury," said MacKenzie. Phoenix is also known for its spa scene, offering everything from mud wraps to hot golf ball massages.

There's also plenty worth seeing around town. "The Heard Museum has the largest collection of Native American artifacts (and) the Desert Botanical Garden has the largest collection of cacti in North America," said MacKenzie.

Unique adventures

- Phoenix has an emerging craft beer scene, with a dozen or so breweries and more than 60 wineries in the area. Imbibe on a craft brewery tour or a "water to wine" kayaking tour where you paddle between three different vineyards.
- Arizona offers some of the world's top canyoneering. Several operators offer adventures for different skill levels — from bouldering and rappelling to exploring wet canyons.



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Explore the winding trails of Wales

Hiking haven. This rugged country offers both epic journeys and leisurely walks

Looking for a hiking vacation that's off the beaten track but guaranteed to delight with an array of trails for all skill sets, amazing views, quaint accommodations, a wealth of history and top-notch cuisine?

Consider Wales.

The mountainous country, part of the United Kingdom, is bordered by England in the east, the Irish Sea to the north and west and the Bristol Channel in the south.

There are several world-class hiking regions, all distinct, all worth seeing, and situated close enough to one another that most of Wales can be explored in as little as a week via rental car.

There are no direct Canadian flights to Wales, but fly into any of the major London airports and connect to either Cardiff, Swansea or Liverpool. From Liverpool, it's a quick jaunt into the northern reaches of Wales, where you can start your hiking vacation in the Llandudno and Colwyn Bay area.

The hiking highlight of the region is the Great Orme, a coastal landmark more than 200 metres above sea level with Stone Age origins.

There's a circular walk around the headland that starts and finishes at the summit, providing spectacular views of Liverpool Bay and the Irish Sea, the Carneddau mountains, the island of Anglesey and the Menai Strait — a stretch of which is called the "swellies" by locals due to its hazardous whirlpools and surges.

History lovers shouldn't miss Conwy Castle, built by Edward I during his conquest of Wales between 1283 and 1289. It's among the best-preserved medieval fortifications in Britain, and visitors can wander its battlements at will.

From Colwyn Bay, veer southwest into the grandeur of Snowdonia.

The famously stunning region is dotted with picturesque villages. Stop at Betws-y-coed on your drive in, an impossibly pretty riverside hamlet with a cosy pub located at the Ty Gwyn Hotel and featuring an excellent menu. The local steamed mussels and salt-marsh lamb shouldn't be missed.

A hiker takes in the view at Snowdonia. THE CANADIAN PRESS

To work off your lunch, there are trails for hikers of all capabilities. Expert climbers can take on the seven-hour hike up Mount Snowdon, the highest peak in south Britain, via the Crib's Goch knife-edge ridge, but there are plenty of other shorter, less hair-raising hikes through the dramatic hills of the region.

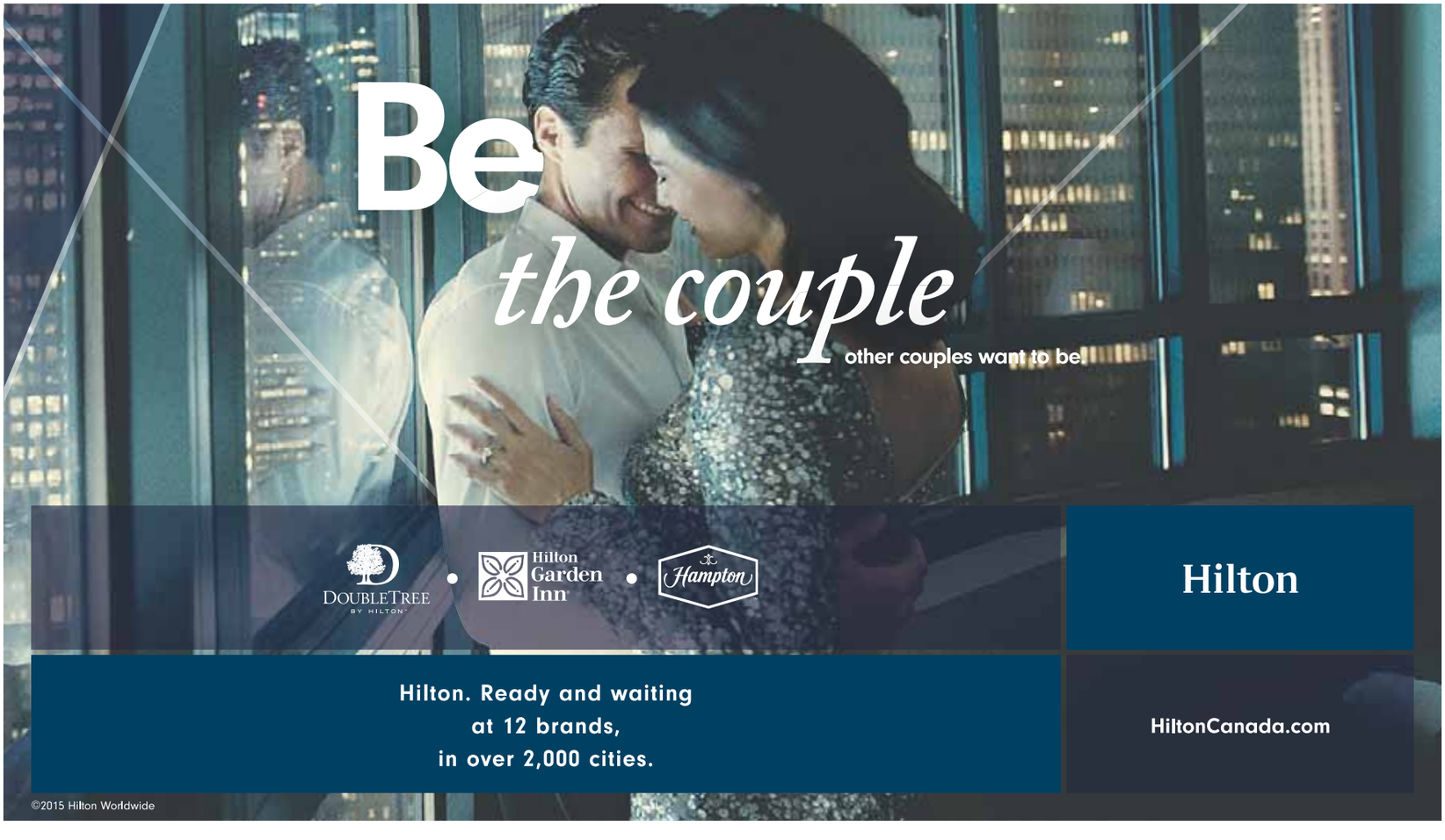
From Snowdonia, veer back northwest to Anglesey. The highlight of the island is the spectacular South Stack Lighthouse, perched on another rugged, windswept isle joined to Anglesey by an aluminum bridge and open for exploration by tourists. There are plenty of hiking trails in the area, including an hour-long hike that starts in Breakwater Country Park in nearby Holyhead and leads to South Stack. The Anglesey Coastal Path also passes by South Stack.

The only possible downside to a Welsh hiking vacation? The rain. Pack rain gear, because all-day sunny hiking weather is rarely a guarantee.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

If you go...

Check out the Visit Wales website at visitwales.com for accomodation options, including cottage rentals, working farms, camper vans and hiking recommendations. Wales Tourists Online (walestouristsonline.co.uk) also has an extensive database of accommodations options.



This recipe serves four. EMILY RICHARDS

Take chili beyond ground beef and beans

Mixed Veggie and Steak Chili. This refreshing take on the classic hearty dish doesn't take much time or effort to make

DINNER EXPRESS
Emily Richards
food@metronews.ca

Try making chili with steak next time you have a hankering during the week. It's just as easy as using ground beef but has a chunkier texture, which is a nice change.

You can use stir-fry strips if you don't want to slice the steak yourself.

Use your favourite fresh peppers or mushrooms, but to make this in a snap, why not check what's available in your freezer and bulk up the pot with a variety of frozen veg?

Pick up a few bags when they are on sale and then you will be ready to whip up this dish or serve up a variety of veggies alongside your favourite weeknight meal.

Keeping a bag of frozen mixed vegetables in your freezer is also an easy way to pump up your soups with flavour and texture, not to mention extra servings of vegetables!

This chili is perfect served up with a crunchy salad.

FLASH FOOD

From your fridge to your table in 30 minutes or less

Directions

1. In large shallow saucepan or Dutch oven, heat oil over medium-high heat and brown steak. Remove to plate.

2. Add onion, garlic, chili powder, oregano and cumin and cook, stirring for about 5 minutes or until softened. Stir in tomatoes, frozen vegetables, beans and tomato paste; bring to a boil. Stir in steak; reduce heat and simmer for about 20 minutes or until chili is thickened.

Ingredients

- 1 tsp (5 ml) canola oil
- 1 sirloin grilling steak (about 12 oz/375 g), in 1/2 inch (1 cm) pieces
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp (15 ml) chili powder
- 1 tsp (5 ml) each dried oregano leaves and ground cumin
- 1 can (28 oz/796 ml) diced tomatoes
- 2 cups (500 ml) mixed frozen vegetables, such as broccoli, cauliflower and carrots
- 1 can (19 oz/540 ml) red kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1/4 cup (60 ml) tomato paste

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Gather a combo of contacts for career success

Career. Tips on nabbing your ideal professional network

LAUREN MARINIGH
TalentEgg.ca

Oh, the places this tablet could take you! ISTOCK

Creating a LinkedIn profile is easy — knowing who to add and how to build your network and connections is the hard part.

Building an ideal network on LinkedIn takes time, persistence and patience. But once you have created a great network of contacts, you'll find LinkedIn is one of your most valuable social media platforms and a great resource.

So where do you start? Here are some tips.

Who to add

Knowing who to add is the most important thing to consider when building any network, but especially on a social platform like LinkedIn.

Keep in mind that LinkedIn is a professional hub, and your connections are a representation of you. Only connect with people you feel will represent you well and that you would be happy for possible employers to see as connections on your profile.

If you are going to reach out to professionals you don't personally know, it's important to make sure that you include a message with your invitation, so that they understand why you are adding them, and how you may want to network.

Avoid adding people who have no significant value to you or your network.

These people may be those that aren't in your field, friends you haven't kept in touch with, and of course, people that you don't know or trust.

Always make sure that you skim the profile of each possible new connection you make, as this is a way to validate who they are, and why they are relevant to you.

Peek at your new pal

"Always make sure that you skim the profile of each possible new connection, as this is a way to validate who they are, and why they are relevant to you."

What employers are looking for

Employers often first look for mutual connections, and how you link back to them personally.

It sparks a common ground when an employer notices you have a connection in common.

This could also be negative if the connection in common isn't someone who has the best reputation with the employer or human resources manager looking up your profile.

Employers also want to see that you have worked to build your network. Profiles that only have minimal connections or no connections at all can raise a red flag. If you are going to be on LinkedIn, commit yourself to building your network, and keeping your profile updated, otherwise it's almost better to stay off of it.

Not sure how to build your network or don't know very many people on LinkedIn?

Start with creating a great profile, sharing regular content, and getting involved in LinkedIn groups and company pages.

Who to remove

LinkedIn is a professional network in comparison to Facebook. Who you connect with on LinkedIn is probably not necessarily who you connect with on Facebook and vice versa. Keep LinkedIn your professional network, and don't be afraid to remove those connections you may not want to be associated with anymore.

- Remove those that you haven't stayed in touch with enough to know what they are doing professionally. Remove those who are inactive and haven't updated their profiles in a long time, and people that may have switched career paths and no longer seem to be relevant to your network or career. The important thing to remember is that you can't worry about people being offended if you removed them. LinkedIn is a virtual resumé, and if your connections aren't adding value to your profile, there really is no point being connected.
- Once you have a good LinkedIn network, you'll start reaping the rewards of networking within your industry. LinkedIn is a great resource for anyone, but especially for new grads with minimal experience and limited industry connections. LinkedIn can be your go-to site for finding jobs and building your professional reputation and network.

You'll notice your network will slowly begin to grow.

And hey, don't forget to add all your colleagues from past jobs, or classmates and teachers from college or university.

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Give your portfolio a noticeable pick-me-up

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CELINE TARRANT
TalentEgg.ca

Many professionals make the mistake of thinking that they don't need a portfolio because they don't have anything to put in one. Here's how to put together a professional portfolio that will help you showcase your work, highlight your skill set, and can serve as a valuable career planning tool.

What is it? What should you include in it?
This is not a resumé; it's a collection of your professional achievements. Unlike a resumé, there's no page limit, so it should include all the projects you've worked on, recommendations, reference letters, awards, side projects, publications, a listing of conferences and events you have attended or spoken at, courses and workshops, and anything else you feel is relevant to your professional life.

Why do it?
• To jog your memory (and your manager's): Simply put, most people are terrible at remembering things. Unless you write down and reflect on relevant and important experiences, it's easy to forget about them.

If you forget about your own achievements, what are the chances a potential employer will remember? It's important to document and showcase what you have accomplished so you can communicate more effectively with your manager about how you have contributed to the team, and demonstrate ways you have gone above and beyond.

To help you land your next job:
As you advance your career, this tool should also make it easier for you to quickly gather and comment on relevant work experience. For example, if you're in PR and applying for a marketing job, you should be able to look to your portfolio and very easily gather all the marketing-related projects you have worked on and identify the overlapping skill sets because you have carefully organized and tracked them over the years.

Career planning and development:
As you go through the exercise of putting together your portfolio, and continue to add to it over time, patterns will start to emerge. Maybe you notice that all of your projects have been internal and you need some more client-facing experience.

Or that you've been to five social media workshops this year, and you still haven't put up your hand to run the next Twitter campaign. It should help you identify where you are over- or under-indexed in certain areas, highlight gaps in your skill set, and draw your attention to opportunities for personal development.

Putting it together

How you actually collect everything and organize it is up to you.

- Maybe it's a formal hard-copy document that you use publicly and share with others. Maybe it's just an informal folder on your computer where you keep relevant documents for your eyes only.
- However you choose to do it, the thing that matters is that you are keeping track of all the amazing work you are doing, and keeping it up to date and relevant.
- Set a recurring calendar date with yourself each month and commit to revisiting your portfolio to reflect on your experiences so far, update it with new information, and plan for the month ahead.

You will often need references from your manager when looking for a new job. You can use a portfolio to help guide your manager to highlight what is important to the new job, not just what they can remember you worked on. ISTOCK

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Packing your lunch like a professional

Career. Six tips that will help you prepare homemade, healthy lunches simply and swiftly

RIANA TOPAN
TalentEgg.ca

Is healthy eating one of your resolutions for 2015? A great way to achieve that is by packing a lunch for school or work. It will save you a lot of money in the long run, too. Here's how to get started.

Having an ammo of healthy snacks at the ready will help to curb your cravings throughout the day. ISTOCK

Plan ahead
Plot out four weeks' worth of meal ideas in a calendar or schedule. Choose options you enjoy, that you can make in advance and that are easy to transport. Repeat your plan every month, and mix it up when you get tired of certain meals, or to reflect what you have in your kitchen.

Sketching out your meals for the month will take away the stress of trying to come up with new ideas all the time. It will also mean you know exactly what you need to buy each week to prepare your lunches, saving you time in the grocery store. If you're trying to save money or prefer to eat locally, adjust your meal plan seasonally, and check what's on sale at the start of each month to stock up on non-perishables, then incorporate those into your meal plan for the next four weeks.

Prepare meals in batches
You can save time by preparing multiple meals at once, because it cuts down on the overall time you have to spend washing, chopping, cooking, portioning and cleaning up. Block off a couple of hours each week to prepare your lunches for the next five days (Sundays are great if your schedule allows).

If you don't already have one, invest in a Tupperware set that includes different sizes for your main meal, snacks, sauces and accompaniments. Having four to six good-sized containers will mean you can pre-portion several meals at once. Opt for glass containers or BPA-free plastic.

Strive for balance
Although you should stick to meals that don't take long to prepare, you don't want to sacrifice nutrition. The key to a healthy meal is ensuring that it's well rounded. Ideally, your lunch should be proportioned as follows: half your plate should be vegetables and/or fruit, a quarter should be protein and the other quarter should be grains.

Keeping this in mind means you can toss together a balanced meal that will keep you satisfied until dinner, as long as you choose healthy options.

Hurried and hungry

Have ready-made meals on hand

- We all have days when we're especially tight on time, so be prepared for even the busiest of days by keeping at least 2-3 frozen or non-perishable meals that you can pack for lunch as a last resort. Having a few homemade meals in your freezer is great, otherwise premade soups, chili or pasta dishes work well.
- Try to always have at least a couple of fresh items in your fridge so you can round out the meal with a couple of servings of vegetables or fruit. It's also a good idea to keep nutritious snacks at your desk (like fruit, trail mix, granola bars, brown rice cakes, whole grain crackers and nut butter) so that healthy options are always within reach whenever you get hungry.

Use what you have on hand; try beans, legumes, nuts, seeds and lean meats for your protein, whole grains like brown rice, quinoa, and whole wheat noodles for your grains and a variety of fresh produce for the fruit/vegetable portion of your meal.

Keep your kitchen well stocked
Always make sure you have the ingredients for a quick go-to lunch in case you don't have time to go shopping or spend more than a few minutes preparing your next midday meal.

Sandwiches are great when you're pressed for time, so keep a loaf of whole wheat bread in your fridge or freezer and have nut butters, jams, vegetables, cheese, hummus or cold cuts on hand.

Having a well-stocked kitchen ensures you're less likely to run into a situation where making a meal at home isn't an option. If everything you need to make a healthy, homemade lunch is already right in front of you, you'll be less tempted to buy food out.

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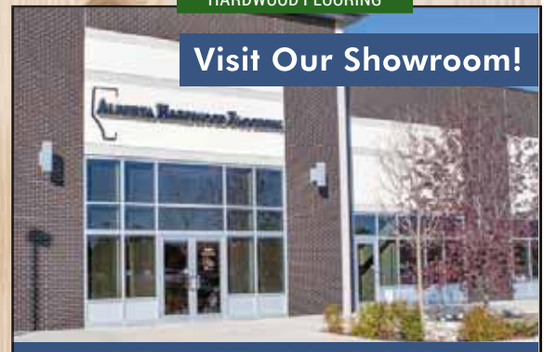

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Better to burn out than to Flame away

THE HOCKEY NEWS
Brian Costello
calgary@metronews.ca

When the Flames slipped out of the Western Conference's top eight for the first time a few weeks ago, I started looking at the standings from a bottom-up approach. And with that, I'm endorsing the school of thought that Calgary being nearer to the bottom would be an OK pill to swallow, after all.

That's not to suggest seeing Calgary make the playoffs wouldn't be a good thing. That's stating the obvious. But if the Flames continue to tread water, it would greatly be in their best interests to slip into the bottom seven in the league. Here's why:

There are always dividing lines in the caliber of talent at the NHL draft. We know Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel are generational-type talents who can turn a franchise around (McDavid more so after the world juniors). The Flames don't have a shot at either of them unless they're lucky enough to win the lottery.

Then there's a group of five other prospects in the 2015 draft who are considered can't-miss and as special as they get. They'd all be in the discussion for first overall in any other draft year. They include forwards Dylan Strome and Matt Barzal and blue-liners Noah Hanifin, Zach Werenski and Oliver Kylington.

With the Flames slipping in the standings, maybe it's time for Calgary to start angling into a draft position where a blue-chip blue-liner such as Noah Hanifin might be available. MINAS PANAGIOTAKIS/GETTY IMAGES

The Flames are in dire need of defensive depth in the system and would hit the jackpot if they could get Werenski or Kylington at six or seven. Hanifin is widely considered the third-overall pick behind McDavid and Eichel. There's a drop off in talent after these top seven prospects, plus another shoulder at 15. That's the indication from scouts right now.

Is Calgary bad enough to drop into the bottom seven? Well, Colorado, Dallas and Minnesota have all underperformed in the West this year and are quickly gaining ground on the Flames — with games in hand. I think all three will catch the Flames. In the east, Ottawa, Philadelphia and Columbus would have to pick up the pace and make up six points over the final 40 games.

That would leave Calgary ahead of just five teams — New Jersey, Arizona, Carolina, Buffalo and Edmonton. And that would put a blue-chip defenceman in the stable.

But a lot of pieces have to fall into place for that to happen.

Analytic stats study

Offensive-zone faceoff percentage shows the percentage of faceoffs a team takes in the offensive zone, suggesting they dominate play or possession. Calgary is bottom three in the league.

- **1.** Detroit, 35.92%
- **2.** Chicago, 35.86%
- **3.** Los Angeles, 34.30%
- **28.** Calgary, 29.04%
- **29.** Buffalo, 27.16%
- **30.** Toronto, 26.02%

NHL

Blues keep Oilers singing the blues

Vladimir Tarasenko scored his 24th goal and had an assist, defenceman Barret Jackman earned his second two-point night of the season and the St. Louis Blues beat the Edmonton Oilers 4-2 Tuesday night for their fifth straight victory.

Benoit Pouliot scored twice in the third period for Edmonton, but the Oilers mustered a season-low 15 shots and never got closer than a two-goal deficit.

David Backes also had a goal and assist, while Jaden Schwartz and Alexander Steen had goals for St. Louis, which allowed just 15 shots — a season best — to make it somewhat easy on goalie Jake Allen. The Oilers are last overall in the NHL, with a league-low two road victories. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NHL

Rinne leaves hurt in Predators' win over Canucks

Craig Smith scored twice and Colin Wilson had a goal and two assists to lead the Nashville Predators to a 5-1 win over the Vancouver Canucks on Tuesday night.

Nashville lost goaltender Pekka Rinne, who leads the NHL with 28 wins, to a lower-body injury in the third period.

Rinne was hurt when Vancouver forward Chris Higgins drove toward the Predators' net and became entangled with Nashville defenceman Anton Volchenkov. The pair then collided with Rinne, and their momentum carried the Finn into the end boards. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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NBA

Wolves' Williams torches Pacers

Mo Williams scored a career-high 52 points, most in the NBA this season, and the Minnesota Timberwolves snapped a 15-game losing streak with a 110-101 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Tuesday night.

Williams made six three-pointers, including one that gave Minnesota a 102-96 lead. Andrew Wiggins added 20 points and Gorgui Dieng had 10 for the Timberwolves (6-31), who won for the first time since beating Portland 90-82 on Dec. 10.

C.J. Miles had 22 points and C.J. Watson added 17 for the Pacers (15-25), who have lost three of four.

Wiggins scored on a put-back dunk and then converted a three-pointer to give the Timberwolves a 93-90 lead with 4:29 remaining.

But it was mostly Williams who powered the Wolves to just their third road victory this season.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Road to conference finals bumpy for NFL's final four

NFL playoffs. Patriots, Seahawks, Packers and Colts have all overcome snags early in season

There are the 2007 Patriots, a juggernaut, and the 2014 not-so-dominant version.

There are the current Seahawks, not quite as fearsome as last year's championship edition.

Throw in a Packers team that doesn't much resemble the Lombardi squads, and a group of Colts who have experienced more ups and downs this season than the rest of this final four.

Yes, it's been a long and winding road to the conference title games for New England, Seattle, Green Bay and Indianapolis.

The Seahawks were 3-3 and fighting off the championship hangover in October. They've won 10 of 11 since, and their defence became immovable once all-pro inside linebacker Bobby Wagner returned from a right foot injury.

"When I went into this year with the thought that this is a very unique chance at showing that you can handle all of that — it's been difficult for people and the history of it shows you that it's hard to come back and get yourself back into this kind of position again," Seahawks coach Pete Carroll said. "So this is exactly where we'd hoped we would be right now."

Just as much in the doldrums back in early autumn as the Seahawks: Tom Brady and the Patriots. They were 2-2, coming off an ugly loss at Kansas City in prime time.

The three-time Super Bowl winner had little cohesion with a mediocre group of wideouts other than Julian Edelman. Star tight end Rob Gronkowski was slowly coming back from injuries that basically wiped out his previous season. Questions abounded concerning the running game, the offensive line, and a defence that had been torched in two of the first four games.

In the next 12 weeks, the Patriots won 10 times. Between Oct. 5 and Nov. 23, they never scored fewer than 27 points and averaged more than 39 points in a seven-game winning streak.

Think New England straightened things out?

"It's hard to be oblivious to things," Brady said of commentaries that the Patriots were no longer elite. "We all have TVs or the Internet, or the questions I get and the emails that I get from people that are concerned. Nobody died or anything. It's just a loss and I think we've always done a great job putting losses behind us quickly."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Quoted

"We don't want to be the best team Week 1 and then basically shut it down for the remainder of the season. We want to grow and get better week in and week out, and in doing so you're going to take some tough losses, and you have to learn from them and bounce back."

Colts defensive end Cory Redding on peaking during the playoffs

Road woes

4

At 13-4, the Packers have had a successful season. All four of their losses, however, have come on the road, where they are 4-4. They play in Seattle on Sunday.

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2015 Chrysler 200

- **Type.** Four-door, five-passenger midsize sedan
- **Engines.** 2.4-litre four-cylinder (184 hp), 3.6-litre V6 (295)
- **Transmission.** Nine-speed automatic
- **Price.** $22,495 (2.4L), $26,995 (V6) base; $38,995 as tested

Market position

Chrysler's purchase by Fiat has given it access to new engineering, including the Alfa Romeo chassis under the 200. The company is now catching up in the small and midsize markets thanks to these Italian partners.

Points

- The all-wheel system disconnects the rear axle when not required, to improve fuel economy, but sends power to the back wheels whenever needed for extra traction.
- The transmission is shifted by a dial, which frees up console space.
- An optional self-parking feature works on parallel or perpendicular parking spots (and does a very good job).

The AWD system disconnects the rear axle when not needed.

Interesting features

Eight airbags and active front head restraints are standard issue. Also available are blind-spot monitoring, cross-traffic alert, a self-parking feature, ventilated seats and navigation.

Getting back into the game

PHOTOS: JIL MCINTOSH

Review. Alfa Romeo chassis helps redesigned Chrysler 200 compete in the tough midsize family sedan category

JIL MCINTOSH
drive@metronews.ca

Midsize sedans are an important segment, and if you're going to make it here, you've got to bring ammunition.

This has usually been a weak point for Chrysler, but it's finally in the game with the 200 sedan, which has been completely redesigned for 2015. It still has some flaws, but it's finally strong enough to tackle the competitors.

The base engine is a 2.4-litre four-cylinder making 184 horsepower, which is available in all four trim levels (LX, Limited, 200S, and 200C). My tester was optioned with the 3.6-litre V6 that can be added to the S and C trims. Mine also had all-wheel drive, which can be ordered only with the V6.

Both engines use a nine-speed automatic transmission. The ninth gear is a bit of overkill, as I was only ever able to get into it on a flat stretch of highway. Even then, I had to use the steering-wheel paddle shifter to manually engage it, and on the slightest incline, the transmission slipped back into eighth gear.

The new interior is lovely, with soft-touch materials and excellent fit and finish.

The engine is smooth, but its published fuel consumption is higher than many of its V6-powered rivals, and in combined driving, I averaged 10.4 L/100 km.

The redesigned interior is lovely, with soft-touch materials, excellent fit and finish, and comfortable seats that are clad in soft leather on the top-line 200C.

A heated steering wheel is standard on that trim, but there's some form over function, here. The wheel is enhanced with a handsome chrome ring, which stays ice cold on winter mornings while the rest of the wheel heats up — defeating the entire purpose.

Small-item storage looks limited at first, but you find a ton of space once you start looking. In addition to a console box and an open bin under the shifter, the entire top of the console slides back, revealing a huge hidden cubby.

The 200 can feel a bit pricey at its upper end, but the mid-range models seem right in line. If you're in the market for midsize sedan, there's a new player in town.

Compare

1 Toyota Camry V6
Base price: $33,650
Also redesigned for 2015, the Camry features more aggressive styling and improved driving dynamics.

2 Kia Optima SX Turbo
Base price:$34,895
Optima's optional turbo-charged engine makes 274 hp and boosts driving fun.

3 Nissan Altima 3.5
Base price: $33,498
Long drives remain comfortable thanks to the zero gravity design of the seats, which reduces fatigue.

DRIVE

Hyundai Santa Cruz
CONTRIBUTED

Anti-pickup turns heads at auto show in Detroit

Autopilot. Hyundai aims for a different breed of truck buyers with its Santa Cruz

AUTO PILOT
Mike Goetz
drive@metronews.ca

Pickup trucks were front and centre at this year's auto show in Detroit, proudly showing off their trademark attributes, such as powerful engines, impressive workload and off-road capabilities, and in-your-face attitudes. There was also one odd-looking pickup that wants nothing to do with working for living, racing in the Mexican desert, or scaring young children with aggressive styling. But before I get too deep into Hyundai's Santa Cruz concept, let's run down three traditional pickups that made news in Detroit, to better appreciate the dichotomy between them and the Cruz.

2016 Ford Raptor: This ultimate off-road version of the new-generation Ford F-150 gets its own frame, a wider body and a new turbo V6 purported to be more powerful that the 411-hp V8 that propelled the previous Raptor.

2016 Nissan Titan: An all-new Titan, with a stouter frame, a new Cummins V8 diesel engine good for 310 hp and 550 lb.-ft. of torque, and a massive front grille worthy of a Mack 18-wheeler.

2016 Toyota Tacoma: The first really big update on Tacoma in a decade. I asked Kevin Hunter, head of the Toyota's California design studio, about the desert-racer theme and the very blunt front end. "We like it," he told me. "We just think it's a fist hitting something; that's the way we look at it. Robust. Strong. Powerful. Looks like if you hit something, you wouldn't get any damage on your truck."

All of which couldn't be more different than Hyundai's Santa Cruz concept, which is being promoted as a new truck for a different generation of buyers.

According to Hyundai, those buyers are younger, more female, more urban, and would dearly love a vehicle that is as inexpensive and manoeuvrable around town as a small crossover, but with one major difference: the ability to separate their dirty, wet or smelly cargo from the passenger compartment — cargo such as mountain bikes, camping equipment, firewood, hockey equipment, etc.

Hyundai calls these people urban adventurers. They are committed to their city lifestyle, but also like to get out on the weekend and do stuff outdoors.

Both lifestyles would benefit from a pickup, but they don't want to drive a big, expensive pickup around town the rest of the time.

"We're not trying to attract truck buyers, so max towing, ground-clearance and max payload is not the point at all," said Mark Dipko, head of product planning at Hyundai America.

"Research tells us that not everyone that needs an open bed wants that capability or the trade-offs that come with a traditional pickup."

Hyundai says the Santa Cruz is its most-researched concept ever, and the automaker is convinced it would be a hit with its intended audience.

Some cool features on the concept include a 2.0-litre turbo diesel engine, a tailgate extension that makes the bed as long as a midsize pickup bed, mini doors for the rear-seat passengers, and a lockable and rigid tonneau cover.

Toyota's 2016 Tacoma is its first major redesign in a decade. MIKE GOETZ

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LEASE FROM $70#@ APR 1.99%£ DOWN PAYMENT $0

WEEKLY FOR 60 MONTHS
MSRP $27,685 (INCLUDES FREIGHT & PDI)

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MODEL SHOWN: ODYSSEY TOURING

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#/£ Limited time lease offers from Honda Canada Finance Inc. (HCFI), On Approved Credit. Weekly lease offers apply to a new 2015 CR-V LX 2WD, model RM3H3FES/Civic DX, model FB2E2FEX/Odyssey LX, model RL5H4FE for a 60/60/60-month period, for a total of 260/260/260 payments of $70/$42/$89 leased at 1.99%/0.99%/2.99% APR. 120,000 kilometre allowance (12 cents/km excess charge applies). Consumers may pre-purchase up to a maximum of 16,000 extra km/year at $0.08/km at the time of entering into the lease agreement. Total lease obligation is $18,200/$10,920/$23,140. Lease obligation includes freight and PDI of $1,695/$1,495/$1,695 and applicable fees except PPSA lien registration fee of $10.76 and lien registering agent's fee of $5.25, which are both due at time of delivery. No down-payment required. Taxes, license, insurance, environmental fees and registration are extra. Dealer may lease for less. Offers valid from January 3, 2015 through January 31, 2015 at participating Honda retailers. Offers valid only for Alberta residents at Honda Dealers of Alberta locations. Weekly leasing available on terms of 36 months or greater. Offer subject to change or cancellation without prior notice. Offer only valid on new in-stock 2015 vehicles. While quantities last. Visit HondaAlberta.ca or your Alberta Honda dealer for details. * None of the features described are intended to replace the driver's responsibility to exercise due care while driving. Drivers should not use handheld devices or operate certain vehicle features unless it is safe and legal to do so. Some features have technological limitations. For additional feature information, limitations and restrictions, please visit www.honda.ca/disclaimers or refer to the vehicle's owner's manual. NHL and the NHL Shield are registered trademarks of the National Hockey League. © NHL 2015. All rights reserved.

Shift: Hybrids, the environment and technology

Toyota says its Mirai hydrogen fuel-cell car is just as groundbreaking as the Prius was in 1997.

Toyota's fuel-cell model could match Prius as a game-changer

Just as Toyota's Prius gasoline-electric hybrid changed the auto industry, so will its recently unveiled 2016 Mirai hydrogen fuel-cell sedan, the company suggests. Bob Carter, the company's head of auto operations, says the Mirai could equal the impact the Prius had on the industry. But it won't happen overnight, he adds, because fuel-cell cars currently lack a nationwide fuelling infrastructure. Even in California where the Mirai will be initially sold, only a handful of fuelling stations exist. However, Carter tells Automotive News that Toyota is expecting 23 new fuelling stations will be built in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas by the time the Mirai launches there later this year. ALL STORIES AND PHOTOS FROM WHEELBASEMEDIA.COM

Ghosn thinks electrics are the answer

With global sales of the all-electric Nissan Leaf up by 20 per cent this year, making it the top-selling electric vehicle worldwide, Renault-Nissan CEO Carlos Ghosn sees almost unlimited opportunity for future plug-in electrics. He says the 200,000 EVs sold globally by Renault-Nissan represents a savings of nearly 200 million litres of petroleum, "fuel that was not extracted, shipped or burned into the atmosphere." In addition to reducing petroleum dependence, EVs increase consumer choice, creating "an important shift" in the marketplace, he says. "As the internal engine monopoly crumbles, consumers will enjoy even more mainstream EV options and range." Their biggest advantage, Ghosn said, is that EVs can tap into existing infrastructure, unlike hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles that require all-new infrastructure.

Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn says battery electrics are better than hydrogen electrics because the infrastructure is already here.

Just because a car is enviro-friendly, like Honda's Fit EV, doesn't make it popular — proving that governments can't control the free market.

Several environment-friendly models have been discontinued for 2015

Car models come and go. But among those notably not returning for 2015 are ones considered more environmentally friendly than the norm. Discontinued models include Chevrolet's Malibu Eco and Impala Eco, mild hybrids that neither sold well nor were very well promoted; Honda's Fit EV, which was widely seen as a compliance car designed simply to boost corporate fleet economy numbers; and Toyota's RAV4 EV, as the company turns its focus to hybrids and fuel cells.

Check out some of the reasons why Nissan is

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KROM MT model shown▲ (KROM Edition)

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1.6 SL model shown▲

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1.8 SL model shown▲

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SL AWD Premium model shown▲

OFFERS END FEBRUARY 2ND - VISIT CHOOSENISSAN.CA OR YOUR LOCAL RETAILER

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AMVIC Licensed. ***Lease payments of $39/$39/$65 on the 2015 Versa Note/2014 Sentra/2015 Rogue must be made on a monthly basis and cannot be made weekly. Weekly lease payments are for advertising purposes only.** **Offer applies to Nissan Canada Finance (NCF) lease and finance contracts on new 2015 Micra (SV & SR trims only), 2015 Versa Note, 2015 Altima Sedan, 2014 Sentra models when reported as sold between Jan. 3 – Feb. 2, 2015. This program is applicable to NCF special or standard finance rates. This is a limited time offer. Not combinable with fleet discounts. First time buyers are not eligible for the program. Customers leasing or financing through NCF can choose one of the following options: Three (3) Payment Waivers or one (1) payment of $500 NCF Cash. Lease or finance a 2015 Micra (SV & SR trims only), 2015 Versa Note and 2014 Sentra, $450 (inclusive of taxes) per month on 2015 Altima Sedan, 2015 Rogue and 2014 Rogue, up to a maximum of $350 (inclusive of taxes) per month on 2015 Micra (SV & SR trims only), 2015 Versa Note and 2014 Sentra, $450 (inclusive of taxes) per month on 2015 Altima Sedan, Consumer is responsible for any and all amounts in excess of $350 (2015 Micra (SV & SR trims only), 2015 Versa Note and 2014 Sentra) /$450 (2015 Altima Sedan) per month (inclusive of taxes). The 3 Payment Waivers cannot be combined with the Nissan Finance Cash alternative; only one option can be selected. This program is applicable to Nissan Finance contracts only. This program is a limited time offer. Not combinable with fleet discounts. The Three (3) monthly payment waivers or the Nissan Finance Cash alternative options are both not eligible for program protection. Units must come from dealer stock and reported as sold before or on Feb. 2, 2015. †No charge All-Wheel Drive (AWD) has an equivalent value of up to $2,000 applicable on all 2015 Rogue models (except Rogue S FWD (Y6RG15 AA00)/Rogue SV FWD (Y6SG15 AA00)). Offer only applicable on cash purchase or finance. Discount is deducted after taxes. **MSRP starting from $9,998 for a 2015 Nissan Micra® 1.6 S, MT (S5LG55 AA00) excluding Freight and PDE charges and specific duties of new tires. #Representative finance offer based on 2015 Nissan Micra® 1.6 SR (S5SG55 AA00) Manual transmission. Selling Price is $17,268 (financed at 0% APR equals 130 bi-weekly payments of $133 for an 60 month term. $0 down payment required. Cost of borrowing is $0 for a total obligation of $17,268. This offer cannot be combined with any other offers except stackable trading dollars. Retailers are free to set individual prices. Dealer order/trade may be necessary. Vehicles and accessories are for illustration purposes only. Offers, prices and features subject to change without notice. Offers valid between Jan.3 – Feb. 2, 2015. ^Nissan is the fastest growing brand in the non-luxury segment based on comparison of 12 month retail sales from October 2013 to September 2014 of all Canadian automotive brands and 12 month retail sales from October 2012 to September 2013 of all Canadian automotive brands, excluding fleet sales and medium and heavy duty trucks. Nissan is the fastest growing brand in the non-luxury segment based on comparison of 12 month retail sales from October 2013 to September 2014 of all Canadian automotive brands and 12 month retail sales from October 2012 to September 2013 of all Canadian automotive brands, excluding fleet sales and medium and heavy duty trucks. All financial information compiled from Canadian Sales Figures Data and third-party sources, including manufacturer websites. Gasoline engines only, excludes hybrids, diesels and electric vehicles. July 30, 2014. Offers subject to change, continuation or cancellation without notice. Offers have no cash alternative value. See your participating Nissan retailer for complete details. ^1998-2014 Nissan Canada Inc. and Nissan Financial Services Inc., a division of Nissan Canada Inc.

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Stuck on 12 Across? Scan this image with your Metro News app for today's crossword and Sudoku answers. It's OK. No one's watching.

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→ See the full instructions on Metro's Voices page.

Horoscopes by Sally Brompton

♈ Aries
March 21 - April 20
Be less predictable, especially when dealing with people in positions of power. Too many people are taking you for granted — and will continue to until you do something.

♉ Taurus
April 21 - May 21
There are a lot of people out there who could benefit from your brand of kindness, so start looking for ways you can assist.

♊ Gemini
May 22 - June 21
With your ruler Mercury strong today you are in a can-do mood but you may have to deal with people who seem incapable of making decisions. Stay calm.

♋ Cancer
June 22 - July 23
Today's positive cosmic influences suggest you can ask for almost anything you want and partners and loved ones will hand it over with no questions asked.

♌ Leo
July 24 - Aug. 23
You are advised not to take money issues too seriously today, not because they don't matter but because you may well be looking at them from completely the wrong angle.

♍ Virgo
Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
A little of what you fancy today will do you the world of good. Don't listen to those who say it is wrong to enjoy yourself when so many others are finding it tough. Show the world how easy it is to have fun.

♎ Libra
Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Everything seems to be going so well that you may get a bit suspicious and start wondering if it's all too good to be true. On the contrary, loved ones will do anything for you. Enjoy it.

♏ Scorpio
Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Nothing is beyond you. That may sound too good to be true but you really can accomplish something remarkable over the next two or three days, simply by following your dream.

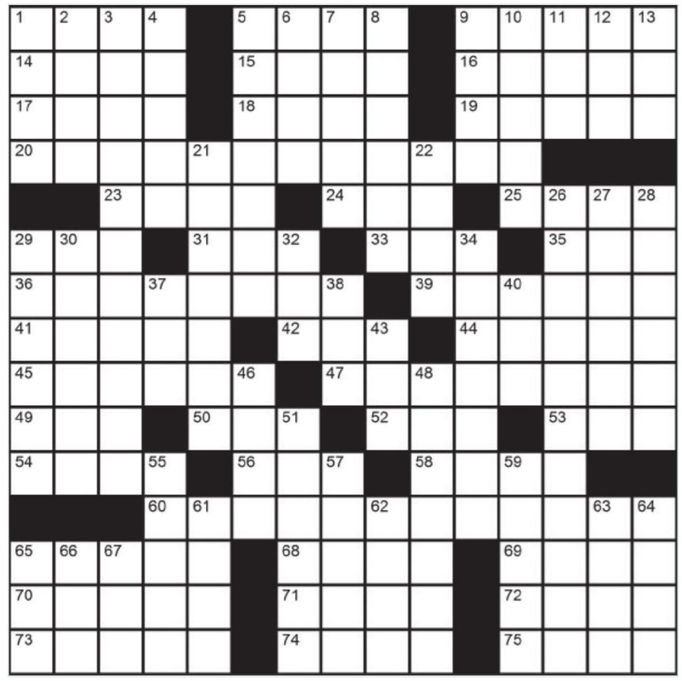
♐ Sagittarius
Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
You will have to deal with someone today who is so slow that it drives you mad. Not everyone thinks or acts as quickly as you and sometimes you just have to wait for the slowest one in the group.

♑ Capricorn
Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
It is not your job to please someone else – it is their job to please you. Partners and loved ones know exactly what it is you desire — all you have to do is let them give it to you.

♒ Aquarius
Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
By all means have fun today but don't go too far and put your wellbeing at risk. Always leave a little something in reserve.

♓ Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
You will receive good news today but for some reason you may find it hard to believe. The planets indicate that no one is trying to deceive you.

Crossword: Canada Across and Down by Kelly Ann Buchanan



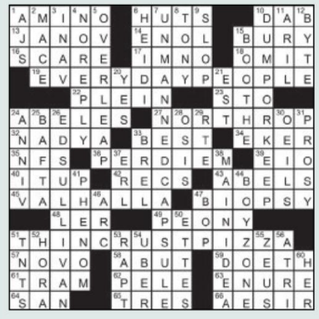
Across

1. Aware of the hoax: 2 wds.
5. __ _ good cause (Reason to donate)
9. Canadian soul songstress Ms. Watson
14. Do this :(
15. "Can _ __ a Witness" by Marvin Gaye
16. Bustling
17. Sacred looped cross
18. __-drop
19. 'R' of US state RI
20. Quebec City's sculpted Wintertime retreat from January 3rd to March 22nd, 2015: 3 mots
23. __-B toothbrush
24. 'N' of RCN [abbr.]
25. Mover's plank
29. Pronounce
31. Young sheep
33. "Uh-huh."
35. Pierre's 'here'
36. Swaps an old car towards the purchase of a new one: 2 wds.
39. Yalta's locale
41. One saying "Eww, gross.", say
42. Sever
44. Dispirit
45. 1989 Janet Jackson album: 'Rhythm __ 1814'
47. Post to a new post
49. Wildebeest
50. __ worth ($$$)
52. Response, for short
53. Beverage menu item
54. Shaggy animals of Tibet
56. "__ Wiederse-hen!"
58. CD part, variantly
60. Map maker
65. Alexander __, Winnipeg-born hockey star
68. Triad
69. "Waking Up in __" (2002)
70. "Why __ you ready yet?" (Hurry up!)
71. Certain citrus
72. Antiquities
73. Funeral rite
74. Narrated
75. Additional

Down

1. Moonfish
2. Something naughty
3. Northwest Territories community called 'Tuk' for short
4. Questionnaire choice
5. Instruments featured in East Coast music
6. Fiend
7. Rule as a Royal
8. Not working but having fun instead: 2 wds.
9. Fashion designer Mr. Jacobs
10. Fireplace leftovers
11. 1990s trial Judge
12. "The Karate __" (1984)
13. Rock's valuable band
21. Afterwards: 2 wds.
22. With, in Montreal
26. Canadian rocker born in Sarnia, ON: 2 wds.
27. "__ __: Dawn of the Dinosaurs" (2009)
28. Ms. Agron of "Glee"
29. Cheap
30. Secrets to some
32. Canadian actor Mr. Bellows
34. Realm of Wilhelm I
37. Agnus __ (Mass prayer)
38. Hide Hair connector
40. Entries
43. Little legume
46. Just about
48. Mobile device operating system
51. Doubled disapproval
55. Plays: Act's one-of-some
57. Relinquish, variantly
59. Unrestrained shopping
61. Sidewalk bugs
62. Fish's 'lung'
63. Finales
64. Pink
65. Maple's drink
66. Blue Rodeo hit
67. 'Mountain' suffix

Yesterday's Crossword



Online

See today's answers at metronews.ca/answers

Conceptis Sudoku by Dave Green

How to play
Fill in the grid, so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved.

Yesterday's Sudoku

2	8	1	4	6	7	3	9	5
9	3	6	8	5	2	4	1	7
7	4	5	3	9	1	2	8	6
5	7	2	9	8	6	1	4	3
4	9	3	7	1	5	6	2	8
1	6	8	2	3	4	7	5	9
6	2	4	5	7	9	8	3	1
8	5	7	1	4	3	9	6	2
3	1	9	6	2	8	5	7	4

	1	5	7		8	4	6	
8				5				1
			2		4			
2								9
		9		6		1		
6								5
			3		5			
3				7				4
	6	4	8		1	2	7	

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